THE EXPRESSIONISTIC THEOLOGY OF HORACE BUSHNELL: A STUDY OF THE APPROACH, GROUNDING AND FORM OF HIS THEOLOGY

by

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INTRODUCTION

One of the more important questions that have been raised by modern studies of the thought of Horace Bushnell is whether or not Bushnell's epistemology was dependent upon a priori metaphysical assumptions. The answer to this question should determine whether Bushnell's thought may be viewed as an anachronistic attempt to counteract the modern forces of relativity in Christianity, or be considered as a bold effort to accommodate theology to a modern world view. William Johnson's thesis is that Bushnell's epistemology was determined by his metaphysics.[1] In Johnson's view, Bushnell's conception of nature and the supernatural preceded his ideas of language and was the basis of the development of his linguistic concepts:

> . . . In order to carry out his plan, Bushnell first had to develop a theory of language adequate to express his belief that Christianity existed "before the foundation of the world. . . ."[2]

It is my thesis that the point of departure for Bushnell's thought was language as it represented in its forms the

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[1]William Alexander Johnson, Nature and the Supernatural in the Theology of Horace Bushnell (Lund: C.W.K. Gleerup, 1963).

[2]Ibid., p. 49.

nature of experience. That problem had occupied his attention long before he had any comprehensive conception of Christianity as the ordering system of the world. It was in fact his investigation of language which enabled the development of his world view as articulated in Nature and the Supernatural (1858). In the two-story structure of language (in Coleridge) he saw an analogy to the two-level experience of knowledge which he had found in Jonathan Edwards. It was his methodology based on this analogy which enabled him to develop his ideas concerning "Nature and the Supernatural together consisting as the one system of God."

This work will explore the nature of Bushnell's linguistic principles and their epistemological relation to the construction of his theology. I will argue that Bushnell's theology was a product of his linguistic theory. It will be shown that he developed his conception of language from the two-fold nature of knowledge which he inherited from Calvinism together with his discovery of the poetic nature of language in Coleridge. Thus, I will offer an interpretation of Bushnell's theology which opposes that of Johnson.[3] In addition, this study will attempt to make clear that Bush-

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[3]A critic of Johnson's book remarked that his "misinterpretations grow out of a failure to take seriously Bushnell's insistence that his theory of language provided the methodological principle of all his writing." Fred Kirschenmann, "Boosting Bushnell," The Christian Century, LXXXII (February 10, 1965), 176-177.

nell was aware that his epistemology did not allow him to base his theology on metaphysical assumptions, but rather upon the evidence gathered from human experience as he observed it in himself and his culture.

The use of the term "expressionistic" to describe Bushnell's theology should be understood as an attempt to illustrate what I regard as the most important characteristic of his theology, the characteristic which distinguished it from others of his period. Bushnell's theological language contrasted with that of his contemporaries in that he believed that theological words were poetic symbols which conveyed subjective emotional impressions rather than intellectually apprehended ideas. Because Bushnell believed that Christianity was primarily a subjective experience, a matter of feelings, his theology was constructed as a system of poetic imagery. By the use of such images he intended to suggest or "generate" a similar subjective impression of Christian faith in others. For Bushnell, then, Christian faith was an internal impression or inner experience, which because of its subjectivity could only be expressed through appropriate symbols.[4]

The central problem concerns whether Bushnell had a priori assumptions which he set out to prove by developing a theory of language, or whether he discovered in the "two-

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[4]Horace Bushnell, Christ in Theology (Hartford: Brown and Parsons, 1851), p. 228.

story" experience of knowledge and language a conception of nature and the supernatural corresponding to his epistemological approach to Christian faith. The thesis of this investigation is that Horace Bushnell's theology was shaped by his epistemology which in turn was based on linguistics; and that further, his epistemology provided the necessary ground for the development and articulation of his thought.

In the first part of this study, the cultural and intellectual background of nineteenth-century New England will be shown to have sown the seeds of the theological controversies which erupted during Bushnell's life. The controversies between Unitarians and Calvinists revolved around the rational presuppositions of idealism and empiricism, both of which Bushnell challenged on epistemological grounds. Inspired by the two-fold nature of knowledge in experience which he received from the Calvinism of Jonathan Edwards, Bushnell rejected the purely intellectual language of contemporary orthodoxy because he regarded it as inadequate to express the deepest level of knowledge in the emotional experience. He found the poetic expression of Coleridge to be a clue to the use of language as a medium which could convey impression rather than idea. Thus, while Bushnell found inspiration from this linguistic epistemology in Calvinism and Transcendentalism, he rejected the rationalistic presuppositions and the accompanying epistemology of both groups.

Bushnell became acquainted with much of the philology and linguistic philosophy of his day, but could find no theory of language adequate to deal with the expression of subjective experience. Thus, he moved beyond those theories to create an original concept derived from what he perceived to be an analogical relation between language and the subjective knowledge of feeling. In Part II, it will be shown that he developed linguistic principles from his belief that the concrete meaning of words had to be understood as the expression of subjective experience. Those principles provided the basis for his epistemological systems of comprehensiveness and paradox. In applying his epistemology to scripture he attempted to liberate or reveal the impressions which lay behind the poetic imagery of the gospels. In so doing he discovered that the gospels presented the Christ of faith and that they did not contain historical sources for a human biography. Thus, it will be made clear that Bushnell's linguistic epistemology enabled him to develop an historical consciousness which separated him from the positivistic historians of the nineteenth century.

Bushnell believed that cultural language was an expression in the form of ideas of subjective impressions. "Comprehensiveness" became a method of understanding rationally conflicting statements by trying to go behind the stated ideas to the impressions which had formed them. Not only did his linguistic epistemology determine his hermeneu-

tical principles, but it also furnished the base for constructing theological statements. Such statements, Bushnell held, should express subjective impressions rather than intellectually defined ideas.

Bushnell's linguistic epistemology also gave him a new approach to the problem of understanding the nature of man and morality. In the third part of this study, it will be shown that Bushnell thought that it was possible to empirically observe an expression of a sense of sin in the language and cultural institutions of a community. He thereby grounded the concept of sin in an expression of the subjective experience of man's feeling about himself and his world. Employing the two-level analogy which he had perceived between the subjective and objective, Bushnell proceeded to develop a concept of nature corresponding to the external, objective world as distinguished from a concept of the supernatural as corresponding to the realm of subjective emotional experience. In that way, Bushnell believed that he had avoided the necessity for basing knowledge of sin and the world on metaphysical assumptions. Moreover, he thought that he had offered empirical evidence to support his conclusions. Consequently, Bushnell believed that his metaphysic was a posteriori and grounded on data derived from and supported by his epistemology.

Part four will examine Bushnell's use of his linguistic epistemology as a tool to create a new way of

expressing the meaning of the basic themes of Christology, Trinity, and Atonement. His analogical view of the relationship between subjective knowledge or impression and objective forms allowed him to declare that Christ was God's "metaphor," i.e., that Christ was the expression of God's nature in terms of man's subjective experience. Therefore, Bushnell felt that it was fruitless to analyze the nature of the "God-man" in abstract, objective terms. One could only perceive the meaning of such an objective paradox in the subjective feeling. Bushnell argued that the New Testament writers understood this form of perception. Accordingly, he held that because they understood the subjective experience of Christ, the gospels presented a Christ to faith, i.e., God in human being, rather than the biography of a human teacher.

In his understanding of the Trinity, Bushnell accepted the limitations of his epistemology in refusing to admit the possibility of knowledge of the interior nature of God's being. He believed that man could only know what was expressed in the finite forms of revelation as accommodated to human nature. He therefore rejected an immanent Trinity as an object of knowledge without denying the possibility of its ontological truth.

Bushnell felt that the concept of the Atonement was misunderstood because of the mistaken methods of interpreting the objective forms of sacrifice. He proposed a sub-

jective-objective atonement based upon his epistemology which considered the objective act of Christ's death as a moral expression addressed by God to man's feeling. He thereby reversed the usual interpretation of the act as a substitutionary sacrifice of a perfect man to save God's honor and sovereignty.

Finally, it can be said Bushnell's concept of the analogical relationship between language and subjective emotional experience was the basic epistemological presupposition which underlay and determined the method, form, and, to a great extent, the content of his theology. This fact should be clearly grasped as a frame of reference by any interpreter who would correctly understand the theological work of Horace Bushnell.

PART I

BUSHNELL'S THOUGHT IN RELATION TO NINETEENTH-CENTURY NEW ENGLAND THEOLOGY

CHAPTER I

BUSHNELL AND NEW ENGLAND CALVINISM

Horace Bushnell was born in 1802 at the beginning of a century which was plagued with religious turmoil. The seeds of disruption and strife had been sown in New England in the eighteenth century with the intrusion of British Empiricism upon the older forms of seventeenth-century Puritanism. The Puritans who had migrated to North America brought with them a number of beliefs grounded in a priori assumptions. Their covenant theology held that the state, for example, was a "compact" by which the people chose their magistrates. However, once elected the rulers were not directly responsible to those whom they ruled. Instead, they were to govern as ideal rulers consonant with the a priori standards of goodness, justice, and honesty, according to the "immutable pattern of church government . . . in the New Testament."[1] As was the case with government, their theology too showed the reliance on a priori principles. In the footsteps of medieval scholasticism, the Puritans

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[1]Perry Miller, Errand into the Wilderness (New York: Harper and Row, 1964), p. 161.

deduced their theological systems from revelatory premises supported by the ubiquitous authority of the church. Moreover, the statement of their theology continued to be expressed in the language forms familiar to medieval scholastics. In the eighteenth century, empiricism began to undermine the a priori ideas of Puritan government and theology.

John Locke, a popular champion of empiricism, was committed to the proposition that knowledge could only be a product of sensory perception, thus he sought to deny transcendent or ideal metaphysical principles as certain knowledge. In contrast with the Puritan "compact," for example, Locke held government to be a social contract between the ruler and the ruled. The social contract did not derive from any a priori assumptions, but was purely a social act. Nor was the ruler imagined to be responsible to some "immutable patterns." Rather, he was responsible to the ruled in accord with the terms set forth in the contract. Similarly, Locke's system left little room for a theology based on a priori universals. His theory of language, moreover, amounted to an attack upon the traditional forms in which theology had been expressed. Locke denied that there could be some transcendent correspondence between words and ideas.

Words were related to ideas "by perfect voluntary imposition."[2] Thus, they were separable and there was no underlying necessary or a priori relationship between words and things. For Locke, then, language was as artificial as government.

A devout Christian, Locke realized that the rigorous demands of empiricism for verification of claims to knowledge threatened the structure of authority in Christian theology. He attempted to surmount the difficulty by rehabilitating the language of Christian revelation within the framework of his epistemology. In his work The Reasonableness of Christianity Locke took the position that the language of the New Testament was the result of "sensible ideas" produced by an experience of the historical events. As such, the ideas possessed a degree of reality through their association with the sensory experience. According to his theory of mental activity, Locke maintained that complex and abstract ideas were the consequence of combining or compounding simple ideas. Thus, abstract concepts could be reduced to the simple ideas arising from the sensory experience of which they were composed.[3] From that standpoint, Locke was able to conclude that the abstract ideas of the

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[2]John Locke, An Essay Concerning Human Understanding, Book III, Chap. 2, parts 1, 8 (24th ed.; London, 1824). Hereinafter referred to as Understanding.

[3]Locke, Understanding, Book III, Chap. 6, part 1.

New Testament, while they were not a priori, possessed a degree of reality because of their relationship with sensory experience. Locke then went on to argue that revelation was a certain form of knowledge since the reflection was able to immediately intuit truth when it perceived ideas arranged in their proper relationships.[4]

With his empiricism, John Locke stood in much the same relation to the protestant scholastic theology of New England Puritanism as had the Nominalists of the Middle Ages to medieval scholasticism. Both the modern and medieval theologies rested their systems on a priori revelatory premises supported by the authority of the church from which doctrinal statements could be deduced. While the language of theology remained unchanged, the relatively stable intellectual environment of the Middle Ages began to crumble before the attacks of the Nominalist School. Perhaps the culmination of those attacks was William of Ockham's empirical argument denying the reality of universals.[5] With the

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[4]Locke, Understanding, Book II, Chap. 1; Book IV, Chap. 1. With his effort to establish revelation as certain knowledge, Locke undoubtedly introduced some difficulties into his system. The assumption that the reflection could intuitively understand truth when it saw ideas arranged in their proper relationships raised the serious question of the determination of what constituted the proper relationships. Locke was never able to resolve the difficulty.

[5]For a discussion of Ockham's argument, see: Etiene Gilson, History of Christian Philosophy in the Middle Ages. New York: Random House, 1955.

erosion of the authority of the church, absolute assumptions concerning the origin and cause of things were called into question. Similarly, in New England, empiricism, spearheaded by Lockean arguments, threatened to undermine the government of covenant theology and the a priori premises from which the contemporary theological propositions had been derived.[6] Empiricism placed New England scholasticism in jeopardy by challenging the reality of theological ideas which had been so carefully defined in the light of universals.

By the late 1720's, the New England theologian Jonathan Edwards became concerned with the implications of Locke's epistemology and its consequences for language. Locke had maintained that while ideas resulted from sensory experience and were represented by signs, i.e., words, sensory experience could not be created by words. The simple idea could be known, but the sensory experience which brought it into being belonged only to the one who had initially experienced it.[7] Thus, language was only a self-conscious instrument to describe and communicate ideas as intellectual concepts. While language was subject to rational manipulation in order to improve its precision in communication, it could not communicate the feeling or

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[6]Miller, Errand, p. 162.

[7]Locke, Understanding, Book III, Chap. 3, parts 4, 11.

emotion which might be associated with sensory perception. This approach disturbed Edwards. Since Locke had maintained that words had no necessary or inherent connection with "sensible ideas," Edwards concluded that "words are of no use any otherwise than as the convey our own ideas to others."[8] In his effort to develop a methodology suited to the unsophisticated nature of his Northampton congregation, Edwards followed Locke's system of reduction and began to reduce the complex words and ideas of New England theology to simple ideas "so that the ideas shall be left naked."[9] He began to doubt Locke's thesis that words were merely intellectual signs able only to convey ideas when he observed that words evoked an emotional as well as an intellectual response in his congregation. While Edwards agreed with Locke that it was impossible to recapture the original sensory experience which had produced an idea, he went beyond Locke with his observation that words produced a new sensory experience in terms of a visceral response. "For Edwards, an idea became not merely a concept but an emotion."[10] Thus, Edwards attempted to bridge the chasm separating the mediate or associational knowledge of reason from

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[8]Jonathan Edwards, Works (New York, 1844), I, 532.

[9]Sereno E. Dwight, The Life of President Edwards (New York, 1830), p. 702.

[10]For a discussion of this aspect of Edwards' thought see: Miller, Errand, pp. 179-181.

the immediate sensation of emotion. Since he believed that language was able to create aesthetic experience as well as communicate intellectual content, words acquired an artistic significance which, because of their association with a chain of sensory experiences, enabled them to produce a sense of beauty.[11]

Edwards' new theory, which he called "the sense of the heart,"[12] became the epistemological ground for the concept of "divine illumination" in which there was an immediate knowledge of God or the good "when the heart is sensible of pleasure and delight in the presence of the idea of it."[13] In effect, what Edwards had done was to provide a justification of the Augustinian tradition of the primacy of faith which had motivated the reformers and fed the stream of early Puritanism, and had done so within the context of an empirical epistemology.

Jonathan Edwards' concept of the "new sense" contributed to the Great Awakening with its frenzied emotional outbursts. Nor did the followers of the "new sense" go unchallenged. The revivalism drew contempt from the more orthodox Lockean scholarship which denied that mere words

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[11]Jonathan Edwards, "Notes on the Mind," Jonathan Edwards: Representative Selections, ed. Clarence H. Faust and Thomas H. Johnson (New York: Hill and Wang, 1962), pp. 27-37.

[12]"A Divine and Supernatural Light," ibid., p. 106.

[13]Ibid., p. 107.

could create sensible ideas. The faculty of Harvard branded the emotional orgies as nothing but "enthusiasm."[14] Influenced by the deism which was prevalent during the Enlightenment, the Harvard divines rejected emotion as a factor in the human understanding. They were incensed at what they considered to be the wild extravagance of the Great Awakening.

Due at least in part to a reaction against revivalism, deism had gained many adherents in New England by the early nineteenth century. In 1819 William Ellery Channing delivered his famous "Baltimore sermon" in which he set forth the platform of the religion of reason and at the same time attacked four of the classic doctrines of Christianity as inconsistent with the God-given rational nature of man.[15] Channing insisted that "revelation is addressed to us as rational beings."[16] Accordingly, the orthodox doctrines of the Trinity, Christology, Atonement, and the nature of man contained rationally unintelligible contradictions.

> It is impossible that a teacher of infinite wisdom should expose those whom he would teach to infinite error. But if once we admit that propositions which in their literal sense appear plainly repugnant to one another, or to any known truth, are still to be literally understood and received, what possible limit can we

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[14]Miller, Errand, p. 154.

[15]William Ellery Channing, Unitarian Christianity, and Other Essays, ed. Irving H. Bartlett (New York: Liberal Arts Press, 1957), p. 9.

[16]Ibid., p. 10.

set to the belief in contradictions?[17]

With that manifesto, Channing challenged the foundations of orthodox Christianity. His emphasis upon the unity of the Godhead gave the name "Unitarian" to the movement as it became a new denomination.

The Unitarians added fuel to the smoldering controversies which were dividing New England Calvinists. The split went back at least to the revivalism which Jonathan Edwards had justified and supported in the eighteenth century. But, the rejoinders provoked by the Unitarian attacks disclosed an even greater disharmony among the Calvinists themselves. To further complicate the scene, in 1819, the very year Channing had issued his manifesto, Connecticut delivered a severe blow to Congregationalism by withdrawing state support. That development combined with the Unitarian menace inspired an effort among New England Congregationalists to preserve their church with its historic Christian doctrines. However, they immediately found themselves divided in their theology and methodology. On the one hand there was the liberal wing, or "New School" Calvinism, represented by Nathaniel Taylor at Yale, which sought to modify the extreme conservative Calvinist position which held that man's sin was in no way the result of his personal choice. On the other hand, there was the "Old School" of

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[17] Ibid.

Calvinist orthodoxy as championed by Bennet Tyler at East Windsor Seminary.

Nathaniel Taylor believed that there were difficulties in the assignment of personal responsibility for original sin so long as it was also conceived to be beyond personal freedom. Taylor opposed Jonathan Edwards' position that the ultimate destiny of man was God's decision alone and did not depend upon human freedom.[18] In his attempt to stem the tide of Arminianism, Edwards had made the distinction between "freedom" and "self-determination." He contended that man's freedom was limited to an acceptance or rejection of God's will for him. But, Edwards maintained, man's decision in no way altered God's plan of predestination. Taylor, on the contrary, felt it necessary to modify the harsh Edwardian position respecting original sin so as to allow for some measure of freedom of choice. In his address Concio Ad Clerum delivered at Yale College in 1828, Taylor offered his views on the nature of sin.

> I answer--it [sin] is man's own act, consisting in a free choice of some object rather than God, as the chief good;--or a free preference of the world and worldly

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[18]Jonathan Edwards, Inquiry into the Modern Prevailing Notions Respecting that Freedom of the Will Which Is Supposed to be Essential to Moral Agency (1745). This document is edited by Paul Ramsey in Freedom of the Will (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1957), Part III.

good, to the will and glory of God.[19]

At East Windsor Seminary Bennet Tyler quickly picked up the gauntlet which he perceived to be thrown at the feet of orthodoxy. He charged that Taylor's abandonment of total depravity had the effect of confusing people concerning the historic Christian doctrines.[20] The prolonged debate which ensued was representative of the ever-widening division which split the legalistic followers of Edwardian theology and the "New School" liberal theology of Taylor in early nineteenth-century New England.

Apart from the doctrinal schism which rent Calvinism, there was a further source of factionalism arising from the question of methodology. Jonathan Edwards had justified revivalism on the ground that words have the power to create sense impressions which in turn produced ideas. However, by the early nineteenth century revivalism had been influenced by the mechanism of the associational psychology pioneered by the Englishman David Hartley. Hartley had held that "since therefore all love and hatred, all desire and aversion are factitious, and generated by association, i.e.,

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[19]Nathaniel W. Taylor, Concio Ad Clerum, A Sermon Delivered in the Chapel of Yale College, September 10, 1828 (New Haven, 1828), ed. H. Shelton Smith, et al., American Christianity (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1963), II, 30.

[20]Sidney E. Mead, Nathaniel William Taylor, 1786-1858: A Connecticut Liberal (Chicago, 1942), Chap. 13.

mechanically; it follows that the will is mechanical also."[21] Accordingly, the revivalist preachers became, by the early nineteenth century, more interested in producing a mechanical movement of the will than in communicating ideas through emotions. The so-called "new measures" advanced by Charles Finney were widely accepted as the standard methodology of revivalism.[22] The popularity of the "new measures" can be attested to by the fact that while Lyman Beecher had been one of Finney's greatest enemies as late as 1827, by 1831, Finney was preaching in Beecher's Boston pulpit with the full approval of the latter.[23] In that same year, revivalism became popular on the Yale campus where it won the endorsement of Nathaniel Taylor.

It was the revivalism at Yale that precipitated the decision of Horace Bushnell to enter the ministry. Following his graduation from Yale in 1827, Bushnell had worked first as a school teacher and then as a journalist. After having become disenchanted with both careers, he returned to Yale to pursue the study of law. At first Bushnell avoided

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[21]David Hartley, Observations on Man (London, 1791), I, 321.

[22]The "new measures" were rules of organization developed by Finney as a device to bring emotional pressure upon a congregation in order to "break" it down. Long meetings at strange hours, with weeping and wailing from the "anxious bench" had proved so effective in conversion that even the Eastern intellectual establishment could not long ignore its success.

[23]Smith, et al., eds., American Christianity, II, 13.

any participation in the revival. He was repulsed by what he regarded as an overemphasis on the emotionalism of conversion. At the same time, he could not unreservedly accept the philosophical theology of New England scholasticism with which he had become acquainted as he grew up in New Preston. Eventually, however, Bushnell was prompted to listen to the revivalist preachers from curiosity. His experience with them brought about a conflict between his "heart and head."[24] Revivalism provoked an internal struggle for Bushnell, one which revolved around the central problem of how Christian doctrine might be made meaningful to both the intellect and the feeling or emotions. His inner conflict was further heightened by the debate which raged between the Calvinists and the Unitarians concerning the Trinity. To a large extent, the struggle in New England theology became increasingly Horace Bushnell's personal struggle. Vexed by growing uncertainties and painful doubts, he found the study of law was becoming tiresome and, at last, he found himself so absorbed with the theological issues that he enrolled in the Yale Divinity School to study under Nathaniel Taylor.

At Yale Bushnell was exposed to the associational psychology and the "common sense" school of the Scottish philosophers through the writings of William Paley. Paley had undertaken to reconcile the idea of utility based on

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[24]Noah Porter, "Horace Bushnell," The New Englander, XXXVIII (January, 1877), 156.

egoism with obedience to God. He concluded that the hope of reward and the fear of punishment were sufficient motivation to cause men to act in obedience to the commands of God.[25] The prudent act of egoistic human nature seeking the avoidance of punishment was for Paley a moral act. His practical and readily intelligible approach to Christian morality made Paley a widely influential figure among conservative theologians. Bushnell, however, was not among his followers or admirers. Before he left Yale, Bushnell wrote an essay which was highly critical of Paley.[26] Bushnell's negative treatment of Paley's thought appears to suggest that he was familiar with associationism and "common sense" philosophy, but that his own thought was not in agreement with it.

Bushnell sympathized with the endeavor of Nathaniel Taylor to restore personal responsibility to the doctrine of original sin in opposition to conservative Calvinism. Yet, Bushnell remained unconvinced by the argument which his teacher employed to justify his position. Taylor recited the history of brutality and recounted the atrocities which men had visited upon each other as evidence that sin resulted from man's free decision in his relation with

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[25]William Paley, Principles of Moral and Political Philosophy (1785).

[26]Horace Bushnell, "There Is a Moral Governor" (unpublished MS, Yale Library, July, 1832).

others.[27] Bushnell objected that the kind of objective evidence which Taylor relied upon might just as readily be interpreted to support the idea that sin was the consequence of the inherited depravity of man which rendered him powerless to change his nature by his own unaided choice. Bushnell believed that man's freedom could only be demonstrated by the understanding of the experience of sin as men encountered it in their lives. Further, he came to realize that the only way in which to approach man's subjective experience of sin was through the study of the expression of that experience as manifested in the language and social institutions of a culture.[28]

The nature of language was the main source of Bushnell's disagreement with Taylor. Although Taylor had inherited the Edwardian theology, he was apparently so preoccupied with contemporary doctrinal controversies that he failed to consider the implications of Edwards' theory of language. Where Edwards had suggested that language could produce ideas by the stimulation of emotion, Taylor relied chiefly upon words as vehicles of intellectual argument to sustain his position. Bushnell, on the contrary, came to the conclusion that language was a cultural creation which

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[27]Taylor, in Smith, et al., American Christianity, pp. 34-35.

[28]Horace Bushnell, Nature and the Supernatural (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1895), p. 159.

expressed the sensory impressions of an historical experience in subjective, poetic, forms.

Bushnell was not satisfied with the linguistic theory of Lockean empiricism because it did not take into consideration the subjective aspect of language. He complained that because they followed Locke, the methodology of the orthodox New England theologians had become so rationalistic that theological ideas were presented in the form of equations which by their very form imposed a rigidity and dogmatism upon the ideas themselves. Mathematical language, by its form, imparted a static and definitive content which was not subject to discussion or change without attacking the assumptions upon which it was based. Bushnell objected that because the orthodox theologians had applied that deductive language to theological ideas, they had made their theological propositions appear as statements of ultimate truth rather than as statements of relative human understanding. As he surveyed the theological schools of his day, he began to feel that their conflicts were largely the consequence of the limitations inherent in stereotyped methods which had resulted from the overemphasis on the objective analysis of language.[29]

To see brought up, in distinct array before us, the

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[29]Theodore T. Munger, "The Secret of Horace Bushnell," The Minutes of the 193rd Annual Meeting of the General Association of Connecticut (Hartford: Hartford Press, Case, Lockwood and Brainerd, 1902), p. 39.

> multitudes of leaders and schools and theologic wars of only the century past,--the supra-lapsarians, and sub-lapsarians; the Arminianizers, and the true Calvinists; The Pelagians, and Augustinians; the tasters and exorcisers; exorcisers by divine efficiency, and by human self-efficiency; the love-to-be-in-general virtue, and willing-to-be-damned virtue, and love-to-one's greatest happiness virtue; no ability, all ability, and moral and natural ability distinguished; disciples by the new creating act of omnipotence, and by change of the governing purpose; atibenebt by punishment, and by expression; limited and general; by imputation and without imputation; trinitarians of the three-fold distinction, of three psychologic persons, or of three sets of attributes; under a unity of oneness, or of necessary general agreement, or of society and deliberative counsel;--nothing I think would more certainly disenchant us of our confidence in systematic orthodoxy, and the possibility, in human language, of an exact theologic science, than an exposition so practical and serious and withal so indisputably mournful--so mournfully indisputable.[30]

Bushnell came to the conclusion that the theological controversies of New England were irrelevant, not because the questions raised were unimportant, but because of the way in which those questions were stated and discussed. As long as theology continued to be formulated and argued within a framework defined by the objective conception of language, Bushnell believed that there could be no productive solutions. He was seeking a theological language which would be adequate to the task, one which would include the feelings and the "sentiments of the heart."[31]

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[30]Horace Bushnell, Christ in Theology (Hartford: Brown and Parsons, 1851), p. v.

[31]E. Clinton Gardner, "Horace Bushnell's Concept of Response," Religion in Life, XXVII (Winter 1957-1958), 120-121.

Bushnell was soon to have an opportunity to work out his theory of language. In 1833 he graduated from the Yale Divinity School and was called to the pulpit of North Congregational Church in Hartford, Connecticut. When the new pastor arrived he found his congregation torn by the "Old - School"--"New - School" controversy. Each faction sought to win Bushnell to its side. The Old School party repudiated revivalism as a threat to the sovereignty of God. They argued that revivalism undermined the means of salvation through which God elects those whom he has willed to save. The New School adherents, on the other hand, maintained that the church had grown cold and lifeless; that the revival was a desirable stirring of the Holy Spirit and as such ought not to be resisted. Bushnell felt that each faction of the controversy had some merit. Each was approaching an important idea in Christian doctrine. Yet he perceived that the language of the disputants was a major factor dividing them. That language barrier tended to blind each side to the view of the other and made understanding all but impossible. As Bushnell surveyed the battlefield he concluded that the problem was one of contradictions arising from the fact that both parties relied solely on linguistic symbols. Since he saw no profit in continuing the debate on such grounds, i.e., objective analysis, he met the problem with the method which he was later to call "comprehensiveness." In his sermons he pointed out that no one proposition could express

all the meaning of any idea or impression. He further held that although abstractions might appear to be contradictory, it was necessary to probe beyond the level of contradiction to the appreciation of the subjective experience if one were to attain understanding. It was at the subjective level that man might come to comprehend the impressions which both seemingly contradictory propositions sought to express.[32] That Bushnell regarded his method of comprehensiveness as successful was attested by his own analysis of the situation delivered in a sermon on the occasion of his twentieth anniversary as pastor of North Church.

> I was just passing into the vein of comprehensiveness, questioning whether all parties were not in reality standing for some one side or article of the truth. My position among you kept me always in living contact with the opposite poles to be comprehended. The effect of my preaching never was to overthrow one school and set up the other; neither to find a position of neutrality midway between them; but as far as theology is concerned, it was to comprehend, of possible the truth contended for in both.[33]

Bushnell's successful reconciliation of his congregation confirmed even more strongly his conviction that most theological difficulties arose from a misunderstanding of language. His experience further strengthened his belief that theological language could be made to express theolog-

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[32]Horace Bushnell, "Christian Comprehensiveness," Building Eras in Religion (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1903), p. 395.

[33]Mary Bushnell Cheney, The Life and Letters of Horace Bushnell (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1880), p. 280.

ical meaning provided it was considered to be suggestive or evocative rather than absolute or normative. He concluded that the contradiction encountered in theological language was evidence that the language itself was poetic and subjective and, therefore, should be understood in those terms.[34]

In an address before the Society of Inquiry at Andover, Massachusetts, six years after he had accepted the pastorate at Hartford, Bushnell first made known his views outside his congregation. By that time he felt that his ideas were mature enough to stand publicly. In a letter written to his wife immediately after his Andover speech, Bushnell remarked:

> I have been thinking lately that I must write and publish the whole truth on these subjects as God has permitted me to see it. I have witheld till my views are well matured; and to withold longer, I fear, is a want of that moral courage which animated Luther and every other man who has been a true soldier of Christ.[35]

During the succeeding five years, through sermons and lectures Bushnell elaborated his ideas. When his health failed he was compelled to spend a year (1845) away from his arduous schedule. It was then that he decided upon a vacation in Europe. Once he arrived on the Continent he found that his inability to read or speak either French or German prevented him from attaining a serious understanding of the scholarship with which he came in contact.[36] In any

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[34]Bushnell, Christ in Theology, p. 22.

[35]Cheney, Life and Letters, p. 90. [36]Ibid., p. 40.

assessment of the influences upon Horace Bushnell, it must be understood that his deficiency in foreign languages made him dependent upon English translations of European works. Thus, similarities to European thought which appear in Bushnell have to be accounted for either by familiarity through translation or by coincidence.

Upon his return to Hartford in 1846, Bushnell was further influenced in his departure from the rationalistic methodology of New England Calvinism by his investigation of mysticism. Possibly at that time he became acquainted with some of the thought of the late seventeenth-century French mystic, Madame Guyon. The extent of her influence and the time at which Bushnell was exposed to it remain somewhat obscure. One scholar, Williston Walker, implied that Bushnell read T. C. Upham's Life of Madame Guyon as early as 1846.[37] But, that implication can be readily dismissed on the conclusive ground that Upham's work was not published before 1854.[38] Bushnell's inability to handle foreign languages, noted in the foregoing paragraph, forecloses the possibility that he read Guyon's works prior to their translation into English. William Cowper had translated and

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[37]Williston Walker, "Bushnell as a Religious Leader," The Minutes of the 193rd Annual Meeting of the General Association of Connecticut (Hartford: Hartford Press, Case, Lockwood and Brainerd, 1902), p. 24.

[38]T. C. Upham, The Life of Madame Guyon (London, 1854).

published some of Madame Guyon's poems in 1801. It would seem to be probable that if Bushnell became familiar with any of Madame Guyon's thought as early as 1846, it could only have been through Cowper's translations. Whatever the circumstances, it is apparent that in Madame Guyon Bushnell found a kindred spirit in the experience of the mystical nature of faith. In 1848 Bushnell himself claimed to have undergone a mystical experience in which he attained "a clearer knowledge of God."[39] This experience appears to have psychologically verified Bushnell's emphasis upon the subjective nature of Christian faith. It is probable also that it was this experience that led him to a greater appreciation of Jonathan Edwards' concept of "divine illumination."[40]

This aspect of Edwards' thought had been observed by the controversies of the nineteenth century because theologians depended largely upon his systematic theology.

By emphasizing the subjective nature of Christian faith, Bushnell had estranged himself from the mainstream of nineteenth-century Calvinism which was essentially concerned with metaphysical causes and origins. For example, two years before his mystical experience, Bushnell had published

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[39]Cheney, Life and Letters, p. 191. It is interesting to note that Bushnell's wife related his mystical experience to his grief over the loss of his son. She wrote: "It was a year of great experience, great thoughts and great labors. Five years before God had spoken to him in the death of his beloved little boy drawing his thoughts and affections to the spiritual and unseen, until by slow advances the heavenly vision burst upon him."

[40]See pp. 37-38.

a little book titled Christian Nurture (1846). In that work he set forth a position which he called "organic nurture" which was concerned with the problem of original sin in relation to the rearing of a child in a Christian family. A consequence of his method of comprehensiveness, Bushnell considered the question of the experience of sin and forgiveness within the context of the organic community of the family. In his treatment of the subject, he completely neglected the metaphysical questions concerning the cause and origin of sin. It was his avoidance of the metaphysical aspects which roused the ire of his orthodox colleagues.[41] Originally published by the Massachusetts Sabbath School Society, Christian Nurture raised such a storm that the Society saw fit to suppress it. Bushnell subsequently published it personally.

His mystical experience in 1848 left Bushnell more fully convinced than ever that theological inquiry had to deal with the subjective expression of human experience rather than with logically objective propositions about religion. If theology was to deal with reality, he believed, it had to come to grips with what was in the experience of man rather than what was supposed to be.[42] While the controversy over his first book discouraged him, he remained firm in the conviction that he had discovered a

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[41]The term "orthodox" as used in this study is intended to refer to the Calvinistic tradition in New England represented by the heirs of Jonathan Edwards and his theology.

[42]Cheney, Life and Letters, p. 105.

viable alternative method for dealing with theological questions. He remained equally convinced that he had a responsibility to bring that method to the attention of the world. Bushnell concluded that the objections which had been raised by Christian Nurture were in part due to his failure to clarify and adequately explain the linguistic principles which provided the grounds for his theological statements. With the publication of God in Christ in 1848 he sought to correct that shortcoming. In his second book he developed a theological epistemology based upon his linguistic premises in order to demonstrate why he regarded the metaphysical questions concerning ultimate origins and causes to be irrelevant to theological discussion.

Bushnell considered God in Christ to be his magnum opus. It contained the essence of all his ideas on language, Atonement, the Trinity, and Christology. His later writings and sermons merely restated and expanded on it. In a letter to Dr. George Bacon written in 1875, a year before his death, Bushnell remarked that he had been looking over his works to decide which of them should be included in a publication of his works.

> I have been looking over the first of the two [God in Christ] and have made up my mind that it must be included for it is the set-off, so to speak, of all that I have done, the manifesto; Christ in Theology has no such consequence, being only the answer I made to my accusers.[43]

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[43] Ibid., p. 552.

It was probably his recognition of the need for a "set-off" which led Bushnell to open God in Christ with "A preliminary Dissertation on Language." To return to a true understanding of Christianity required a radical retracing of the steps in theological methodology. At the outset Bushnell saw the need to adopt a stance of epistemological skepticism in order to clear the underbrush of accumulated assumptions which clung to New England Calvinism. He recognized the necessity of rethinking questions anew, of seeking his way without the authoritative support of the church fathers and theologians who had preceded him. Partly because some, e.g., the Unitarians, were unimpressed by arguments from authority, and partly because such argument was the method of the orthodox, Bushnell carefully avoided any appeal to the traditional authorities in God in Christ. But, above all, to have called upon those authorities would have been contrary to his whole approach. He sought a methodology which required that arguments stand or fall on the evidence.

Bushnell's unorthodox methodology together with his poetic use of language in God in Christ so alarmed the more conservative Congregational ministers of Connecticut that he found himself threatened with a trial for heresy. At that point, Bushnell was persuaded to write a rejoinder to his accusers. His Christ in Theology (1851) was a defence in which Bushnell sought to disarm his opponents by demonstrat-

ing that his views were actually closer to those of the historical church than were the ideas of contemporary New England theology.[44] In the introductory statement in Christ in Theology Bushnell delivered a blistering indictment of orthodoxy.

> I hope, therefore, it will not be suspected that I am anxious, in the historic references I make, to establish a repute of orthodoxy. I will even declare to you before hand that I am not orthodox, according to any precise type of orthodoxy that I know; and when I come to points of deviation from what I suppose to be the most authoritative and proper orthodoxy, I shall frankly show where the deviation is, and give you its measure. I have been examining my relations to proper orthodoxy more carefully of late that I had done before and the result is a double surprise; in the discovery, first, that I am so much nearer to real orthodoxy than I supposed, and secondly, that the New England theology so called, is so much further off. Indeed, I am ready, for once, to venture a prophecy,--one, too, which I suppose will seem to many quite incredible, viz.,--that when the smoke of this present commotion is blown away, and the noise of it is exceeded by the sounds of reason, I shall be found, in the book you are examining, to stand in much better keeping with the orthodoxy of the Reformation, connected with the previous times reaching back to the Nicene Era, than do the teachers generally and the current opinions of New England. I only hope that the deviations I profess suffice to prevent my being enrolled as one of the champions of orthodoxy; for I even distaste the word, as a word that is characteristically un-Christian.[45]

If one looks back to the "present commotion," as Bushnell phrased it, it is apparent that his opponents did not fully understand him. Bushnell had not intended to reject the metaphysical assumptions of orthodoxy out of hand. He had put them aside because he was convinced that

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[44] Ibid., p. 257.

[45] Bushnell, Christ in Theology, p. 12.

the matter of epistemology had to be dealt with first. From his position of epistemological skepticism, he attacked the methodology of the reigning orthodoxy. He exposed what he conceived to be the assumptions from which the contemporary theological methodology was derived.

> Without being at all aware of the fact, as it would seem, our theologic method in New England has been essentially rationalistic; though not exactly in the German sense. The possibility of reasoning out religion though denied in words, has yet been tacitly assumed. Not allowing ourselves to be rationalists over the scriptures, we have yet been as active and confident rationalists under them, as it was possible to be--assuming, always, that they address their content to the systematic, speculative reason of men, into which they are to be received, and by which they are to be digested into formulas--then they are ready for use.[46]

While Bushnell questioned the place of human reason in theology, he was more profoundly disturbed by the language of Lockean empiricism in which orthodox theological discussions were conducted. It was, he complained, a "formula" language which was wholly inadequate to express the subjective states of feeling which he regarded as the heart of Christianity. Bushnell saw the need for a language which would capture the inner experience of the Christian and make it transparently clear as opposed to a "formula" language which presented propositional truths to be believed. He hoped that if one could discover such a language, theology might produce "more faith and less dogma." He called the effort to penetrate

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[46]Horace Bushnell, God in Christ (Hartford: Brown and Parsons, 1849), p. 92.

through the objective forms to the subjective Christian experience, "the aesthetic side of religion." In order to evolve such a language, one had to have "eyes to see something besides propositional wisdom."[47]

Bushnell was indebted to Jonathan Edwards for much of his thought, particularly in relation to language and faith. Nonetheless, he recognized limitations in the ideas of his theological and intellectual forebearer. He agreed with Edwards that there was a twofold knowledge to which man had access; a mediate or speculative, rational knowledge of the intellect and an immediate knowledge of the will or heart. Edwards had illustrated his distinction between the two when he wrote:

> There is a difference between having a rational judgment that honey is sweet, and having a sense of its sweetness. A man may have the former, that knows not how honey tastes; but a man cannot have the latter unless he has an idea of the taste of honey in his mind. So there is a difference between believing that a person is beautiful, and having a sense of his beauty.[48]

Bushnell was convinced that there were two levels of knowledge in human experience. But, he felt that Edwards had left no adequate solution to the problem of how knowledge of the heart might be understood or expressed in language. Although Edwards had suggested that words could create "sensible impressions" which in turn gave rise to "simple

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[47]Cheney, Life and Letters, pp. 212-213.

[48]Jonathan Edwards, "A Divine and Supernatural Light," idem, Representative Selections, p. 107.

ideas," thereby relating emotion to concepts, Bushnell found that he had not developed a theory of language which could express the immediate sensible impressions without translating them into abstract ideas. In the final analysis, Edwards could only express a sense of beauty by reducing the word to its component "simple ideas" of equality, proportion and regularity.[49] Thus, Bushnell concluded, Edwards was limited to a language which, like that of Locke, was single dimensional and consisted in the rational manipulation of objective forms or signs. It was wholly inadequate to express the subjective level of human experience which Edwards had at least glimpsed. Bushnell plaintively asked: ". . . where was the language to serve me in such higher thoughts as I might have?"[50] For an answer to that plea he had to look beyond New England Calvinism to the poetic expression of nineteenth-century idealism.

Horace Bushnell reached maturity in a New England which was in a state of religious ferment. At the center of the stage there was the controversy between the Unitarians and the Calvinists. The former held that God, as the Supreme Intelligence, had manifested himself rationally to man through revelation. For them it was unthinkable that truth could not be rationally comprehended. Their oppo-

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[49]Edwards, "Notes on the Mind," Ibid., pp. 27-37.

[50]Cheney, Life and Letters, p. 531.

nents, the Calvinists, maintained that revelation was an act of the divine will and was not to be questioned by the finite human reason. Human reason could only function to aid man to understand revealed truth. While the contest between the Unitarians and Calvinists may have occupied the center of the stage, they were by no means the only disputants. In the wings, the Calvinists carried on their "family" quarrels. On the theological level they argued such questions as whether or not man's sin was the consequence of inherited depravity or his choice. On the methodological level, the issue of revivalism divided congregations.

It would be difficult to imagine that any serious religious thinker could have remained indifferent to or untouched by the religious turmoil in early nineteenth century New England. Certainly, Bushnell was not indifferent nor untouched. He surveyed the scene and concluded that perhaps all the factions had something of value to offer if one could only discover it. While his method of comprehensiveness was developed to enable him to comprehend the possible truths in apparently conflicting positions, it could hardly be considered as an instrument of compromise. Even if one grants that his contemporaries may not have always understood him, the fact that Bushnell himself was so often at the eye of the hurricane is sufficient evidence that he was not a compromiser.

Bushnell's unique contribution was that, apparently alone among early to mid-nineteenth century New England theologians, he saw the possibility and felt the need to approach theology from an epistemological base. He perceived that many of the bitter squabbles of the day were the consequence of the failure to discern two levels of human experience, one objective, the other subjective. But the distinction alone was not sufficient. It was necessary to find some vehicle appropriate to express the experience of each level. Thus, Bushnell came to the realization that language was the key to his epistemology. In subsequent chapters of this study Bushnell's linguistic principles, their place in his methodology and their application to the central problems of theology will be examined.

CHAPTER II

BUSHNELL AND NINETEENTH CENTURY IDEALISM

In the foregoing chapter there was a brief discussion of some of the intellectual influences which affected Horace Bushnell. For the most part, however, the consideration of the matter was limited to the main stream of contemporary New England Calvinist thought. It was noted that while Bushnell was familiar with a number of religious or philosophical thinkers ranging from Madame Guyon to William Paley, the chief theological source from which he drew was Jonathan Edwards. At this point it is appropriate to launch a more extended investigation of the influences upon Bushnell in order to place him in his intellectual milieu.

There was a remarkable similarity in the development of thought in Europe and New England during the early nineteenth century. That fact by itself should not occasion much surprise because much of intellectual content of the time was an American adaptation of ideas "borrowed" from European sources, particularly English. What is surprising, however, is the extent to which Bushnell's thought appeared to parallel or anticipate trends in European thought which

were not well known in his day. We have already remarked that he could not read French and German. Obviously untranslated sources in those languages were inaccessible to him. But, there can be little doubt that he became familiar with many "foreign" ideas through conversations. In a letter to his wife, Bushnell related that he had taken breakfast at the home of Professor H. B. Smith:

> . . . where I met Shed and Bancroft and others, who are more or less known celebrities. They talked about Goethe, Kant, Jacobi, Schelling, Hegel, and other Germans, and we had a good time of it--after we got through with the Germans.[1]

Although one may surmise that through similar discussions Bushnell became acquainted with some European scholarship which was not available in translation, it would be impossible to identify more than a few of such sources. Thus, the question of whether or not many of the facets of his thought were original or assimilated will probably remain a moot one.

One of the major intellectual developments of the late eighteenth century in Europe was the rise of idealism. To a large extent, idealism rose as a reaction against empiricism's claim to objective knowledge. In England, Berkley and Hume had demonstrated how empiricism logically

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[1] Cheney, Life and Letters, p. 414.

led to subjectivism.[2] However, it was the work of the German philosopher, Immanuel Kant, which proved to be the critical stimulus to idealism. In his An Enquiry Concerning the Human Understanding (1748) Hume presented arguments to show that empiricism precluded the possibility of certain knowledge about natural law, e.g., causality.[3] Kant perceived the disasterous consequence that Hume's philosophy portended for human knowledge and set himself to the task of reconstruction. In order to rescue empiricism from the radical subjectivism of Hume, Kant posited Categories of the Understanding which ordered the raw data of sensory perception.[4] The Categories were a priori in the sense that they were structured in the understanding prior to and independent of empirical experience. Kant believed that the Categories "prescribed" to nature its laws.[5] Thus, knowledge of causality, modality, and other categories were not inherent in the data of sensory perception, but was the product of the organization of sensory experience by the understanding.

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[2]Richard Kroner went so far as to call Hume's position "subjective idealism"; see: Richard Kroner, Speculation and Revelation in Modern Philosophy, vol. III of Speculation and Revelation in the History of Philosophy (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1961), p. 183.

[3]David Hume, An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding (New York: The Liberal Arts Press, Inc., 1955), Sec. VII, pp. 72-89.

[4]John Herman Randall, The Career of Philosophy, II (New York: Columbia University Press, 1962), 138-139.

[5]Kroner, p. 202.

In developing his philosophy, Kant made a sharp distinction between the realms of knowledge to which the human mind had access. In the tradition of empiricism, he recognized that sensory perception could only give knowledge of appearances, i.e., phenomena. Of that which might lay behind the appearance, i.e., the thing-in-itself, no knowledge could be had by the understanding.[6] Thus, while Kant had "saved" empiricism from the subjectivism of Hume, in fact he confirmed Hume's diagnosis that no knowledge of a metaphysical order was possible for the human mind. For Kant as well as Hume, knowledge was subjective. But where Hume had in effect reduced all conclusions regarding the character and relationships of the data of sensation to mere probability, Kant sought to restore order to the phenomenal world by making knowledge of it a mode of our apprehension of reality.

Kant soon discovered that he had inadvertently removed the lid from Pandora's box. Subjectivism had been a German tradition stretching back past the Reformation into

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[6]Immanuel Kant, "Transcendental Analytic," Critique of Pure Reason, trans. by Max Müller (London: Macmillan Co., 1881), Book II, Chap. 3; also: Kroner, pp. 199, 207.

[7]Ernest Campbell Mossner, "The Enlightenment of David Hume" in Robert Moellenauer, ed., Introduction to Modernity (Austin, Texas: University of Texas Press, 1965), pp. 50-51; also: George Schrader, "The Philosophy of Existence" in Charles W. Hendel, ed., The Philosophy of Kant and Our Modern World (New York: The Liberal Arts Press, 1957), p. 35.

the Middle Ages. Moreover, the Germans were late-comers to the Enlightenment and, at least partly for that reason, empiricism had never taken deep root in German soil. Thus, while many of Kant's compatriots welcomed what they conceived to be his defense of the a priori structuring of the understanding, they felt that he had not gone far enough.[8] Friedrich Heinrich Jacobi was among the first to raise objections to Kant's position that only the understanding and pure (theoretical) reason could deal with objects of knowledge.[9] Knowledge, the argument went, had to be knowledge of some thing; since the understanding received only the data of appearances, and appearances were not things, the understanding could not provide knowledge.[10] Kant's critics then turned to his practical reason which he had

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[8]Kant was never clear as to whether his transcendental analytic was to be regarded as a methodological principle or a psychological one. In any event, the idealists tended to interpret the categories as metaphysical a prioris. See Randall, pp. 125-127 for a lucid exposition of the problem.

[9]Friedrich Heinrich Jacobi, Werke (Leipzig: Gerhard Fleischer und Jung, 1815), Vol. II, p. 175.

[10]There are several relatively clear discussions of the transition which demoted the understanding and pure reason. Among the best are: Arthur O. Lovejoy, The Reason, The Understanding and Time (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1961), pp. 1-4; Helmut Rehder, "Friedrich Heinrich Jacobi and German Thought During the Eighteenth Century," in Moellenauer, pp. 148-154.

proposed as a solution to the problem of moral choice.[11] Where the data presented by the understanding to the theoretical reason were objects of knowledge, the data presented to the practical reason were objects, i.e., creations of the will.[12] It was largely from the assertion of the primacy of the practical reason that the Transcendental idealism evolved. By the 1790's Johann Gotlieb Fichte who had such great influence on the Transcendentalists and German romantics, had completely jettisoned the Kantian thing-in-itself and had postulated that the sensory perception received by the understanding was in fact the creation of the will. Thus, the world of appearance was idea.[13]

Once the primacy of the practical reason was accepted, there remained the problem of its nature. Was it merely a superior cognitive organ or did it also include or have access to some form of perception? Did it have access to some supersensible realm of being? It is reasonably clear that the Transcendental Idealists affirmed the power of the practical reason to provide knowledge of a metaphysical order; but it is less clear that they--or at least some

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[11]This writer feels that this subject has been covered so widely that it is probably general knowledge for most of his readers and therefore merits no extended discussion here. See: Windelband, Wilhelm, A History of Philosophy, Vol. II (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1958), pp. 573-574.

[12]Ibid., p. 551.

[13]Ibid., pp. 579-581.

of them--thought the data submitted to the practical reason was apprehended by some "inner" organ of perception.[14] In any event they talked of an intuition or an "intellectual perception" (anschauung) of truth. Kant appeared to have assumed they believed in an organ of intuition. In an article Kant condemned the philosophy of intuition as an example of the laziness and vanity of man.[15] He called the intuitionists "mystery mongers" and, in a letter to Fichte, suggested that the latter abandon philosophy as a subject too difficult for him.[16]

In 1800 Friedrich Schelling published his System of Transcendental Idealism which was to be one of the most

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[14]The question appears to be one of whether access to supersensible knowledge is through some organ of perception which operates as a sort of internal "sixth sense" or whether transcendant truth is communicated by the universal, Absolute Ego (Geist) expressing itself through the finite individual Self. Lovejoy, pp. 12, 13, 35, for example, seems to hold the former position, i.e., those Transcendentalists such as Schelling believed in the inner organ of perception. It might be noted that Josiah Royce, Lectures on Modern Idealism (New Haven: Harvard University Press, 1919), pp. 120-121, and Rehder, pp. 153-155 appear to concur with Lovejoy. On the other hand, Windelband, pp. 580-617 (passim) and Paul Tillich, "Existential Philosophy," The Journal of the History of Ideas, V (January, 1944), 50-51, seems to lean to the interpretation that the major Transcendentalists regarded metaphysical knowledge as the work of the Absolute Spirit.

[15]Lovejoy, p. 8.

[16]The expression "mystery mongers" was cited by Lovejoy, p. 11; the reference to Kant's letter to Fichte was cited by Northrop Frye, "The Drunken Boat: Revolutionary Elements in Romanticism," idem, ed., Romanticism Reconsidered (New York: Columbia University Press, 1963), p. 2.

influential works on the German philosophy. Not only was it widely read in Germany, it was that book which was so important in introducing the English to German idealism. Its significance for the thought of Coleridge and his contemporaries is too well known to recount.[17] Transcendental Idealism provided the philosophical basis for both German and English romanticism of the early nineteenth century.[18] It was largely the English, particularly Coleridge, who introduced the Americans to Transcendentalism.

For Samuel Taylor Coleridge the discovery of German idealism offered an escape from the utilitarian ethics expounded by William Paley. While Coleridge agreed with Paley that man was subject to motives derived from the desire to avoid pain and seek pleasure, he maintained that man's rational and intuitive faculties enabled him to perceive a higher imperative.[19] By positing an imperative

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[17]For a particularly good account of specific philosophical influences see: Lovejoy, passim. Representative of the studies dealing with the influence of German idealists on the English see: Georges Poulet, "Timelessness and Romanticism," Journal of the History of Ideas, XV (January, 1954), 10; Clarence D. Thorpe, "Coleridge as Aesthetician and Critic," Journal of the History of Ideas, V (October, 1944), 397 et seq.; G. N. G. Orsini, "Coleridge and Schlegel Reconsidered," Comparative Literature, XVI (Spring, 1964), 97-118.

[18]Windelband, A History of Philosophy, p. 611; also: Edward G. Ballard, "On the Nature of Romanticism," in the Tulane Studies in Philosophy (New Orleans: Tulane University Press, 1959), VIII, 74-86.

[19]Windelband, A History of Philosophy, p. 665.

higher than that accessible to the sensory faculties, Coleridge prepared the ground to distinguish between morality and mere prudence.[20] Following Kant and Schelling, he argued that there were two levels of human apprehension: the "understanding" which operated on the empirical and utilitarian level, and the "reason" which permitted a higher perception and which was the sphere of moral decision.[21]

The influence of Paley was not confined to England. In New England his writings had become a staple in the curriculum of schools of theology. The same motives which had led Coleridge to Transcendental Idealism as an alternative to a utilitarian morality, operated in New England. In any event, a group of young Unitarian ministers welcomed German idealism and took the name "Transcendentalists" to distinguish themselves from the followers of Paley's utilitarianism. The name Transcendentalist was derived from their conviction that there was "an order of truths which transcend the sphere of the external senses."[22] Influenced chiefly by Coleridge, Thomas Carlyle, and Victor Cousin[23] (the French

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[20]Samuel Taylor Coleridge, Aids to Reflection (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1871.

[21]Ibid., pp. 241-253.

[22]A quotation from George Ripley as cited in: H. Shelton Smith, et al., eds., American Christianity (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1963), II, 125.

[23]George Ripley, "Introductory Notice," Philosophical Miscellanies, Translated from the French of Cousin, Jouffroy, and B. Constant, with Introduction and Critical Notice (Boston, 1838), I, 41-42.

advocate of Eclecticism), the Transcendentalists battled the rigid systems of theological expression current in New England. In that respect, they were the counterparts to Coleridge as the latter fought Paleyism in England.

One central issue which stirred theological debate in early nineteenth-century New England was the traditional problem of the nature and relation of revelation and reason. The Transcendentalist spokesman Ralph Waldo Emerson expressed his dissatisfaction with the "old" theology in his manifesto of 1838.

> The stationariness of religion; the assumption that the age of inspiration is past, that the Bible is closed; the fear of degrading the character of Jesus by representing him as a man;--indicate with sufficient clearness the falsehood of our theology.[24]

Emerson championed idealism[25] in opposition to the empiricism of the orthodox. His argument was reminiscent of the Nominalist-Realist controversy of the Middle Ages when he said: "General ideas are essences."[26] In particular, Emerson attacked Lockean empiricism which held that ideas could be accounted for by analysis, by reducing them to their component sensations. Resorting to analogy to illus-

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[24]Ralph Waldo Emerson, "An Address Delivered before the Senior Class in Divinity College, Cambridge, Sunday Evening, July 15, 1838, Smith, et al., American Christianity, II, 139.

[25]The term "idealism" as used here should be understood as an equivalent or synonym for the medieval term "realism."

[26]Ralph Waldo Emerson, Essays: Second Series (Philadelphia: David McKay [n.d.]), p. 249.

trate his objection, Emerson pointed out that the genius of a nation could not be accounted for by observing its individual citizens. "Thus we are very sensible to an atmospheric influence in men, and bodies of men, not accounted for in arithmetical addition of their measurable properties."[27] Emerson left no doubt that for him the reality or truth resided in universals which lay beyond the scope and comprehension of any particular human statement. "Let us go for universals . . . Human life and its persons are poor empirical pretensions."[28]

The heart of the theological controversy between the Transcendentalists and the orthodox concerned the analysis and interpretation of theological language. The Transcendentalists maintained that no particular theological proposition could stand by itself as a statement of "Truth." It partook of truth only to the extent that it was related to the universal Truth. It followed that Christianity was only a participant in the "Divine Truth" along with other religions. Thus, theological language could only be a temporary expression or expediency which reflected the contamination resulting from the particular history and culture in which it arose. Particularity, the Transcendentalists argued, should not be confused with the timeless, permanent, and universal Truth. Theodore Parker, in his famous sermon

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[27] Ibid., 248.

[28] Ibid., 247.

delivered in 1838 ("The Transient and the Permanent in Christianity"), stated in clear terms the Transcendentalist revolt against orthodox theology and methodology.

> In actual Christianity,--that is in that portion of Christianity which is preached and believed--there seems to have been, ever since the time of its earthly founder, two elements, the one transient, the other permanent. The one is the thought, the folly, the uncertain wisdom, the theological notions, the impiety of man; the other, the eternal truth of God. These two bear, perhaps, the same relation to each other that the phenomena of outward nature, such as sunshine and cloud, growth and decay, and reproduction, bear to the great law of nature, which underlies and supports them all. As in that case more attention is commonly paid to the particular phenomena than to the general law, so in this case more is generally given to the transient in Christianity than to the permanent. . . .[29]

While at Yale, Bushnell had become acquainted with Coleridge's Aids to Reflection. He spent nearly six months reading and re-reading that work and was fascinated by what he considered to be "a whole other world somewhere overhead, a range of realities in a higher tier."[30] What roused Bushnell was the polarity which Coleridge had found between the objective, empirical, and the subjective, rational-intuitive forms of Christian experience. Bushnell was already familiar with Jonathan Edwards' theory of the two-fold nature of knowledge. But, he found that Coleridge had gone beyond Edwards and had maintained that not only were there two

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[29]Theodore Parker, "The Transient and the Permanent in Christianity," Smith, et al., American Christianity, II, 141.

[30]Cheney, Life and Letters, p. 209.

levels of knowledge, there were also two levels of language to express the different orders of knowledge.

> In the miracles, and miraculous parts of religion--both in the first communication of divine truths, and in the promulgation of the truths thus communicated--we have the union of the two, that is, in the subjective and supernatural displayed objectively--outwardly and phenomenally--as subjective and supernatural.[31]

The "subjective and supernatural" in Coleridge's thought was the "whole other world" which captured Bushnell's imagination. It awakened him to the realization that language was a "two-story world" analogous to the experience of the two-fold nature of religious knowledge. Thus, Bushnell became convinced that language could be an external expression of the immediate inner spiritual awareness. "It is the skill of life . . . to reach unto things spiritual through things temporal . . ."[32]

In his effort to account for subjective meaning, Coleridge had postulated the "Divine Reason" as that inner faculty which enabled man to perceive the spiritual or subjective reality beyond the limits of the human "understanding."[33] While Bushnell agreed that there were two levels in human perception, he could not accept Coleridge's concept of

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[31]Samuel Taylor Coleridge, Confessions of an Inquiring Spirit (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1957), p. 79.

[32]Cheney, 525.

[33]Cited by Thomas Henry Green, "Introduction," Ibid., p. 32.

"Divine Reason." To attribute such a faculty to all men was, for Bushnell, to confound the issue. If all men were to possess such a universal faculty it could be said to be as much human as divine. Thus, Bushnell believed that Coleridge's assumption of a "Divine Reason" could have no other consequence than to destroy any distinction between the human and the divine.

Bushnell further took exception to Coleridge's view of theological language. The English Transcendental Idealist had suggested that theological language was both metaphysical and poetic. But, he thought that the condition of theological language was due to the fact that it was in an "unripe" stage of development. Coleridge held, therefore, that it was necessary to separate the "husk" of the outward objective forms of language from the "grain" or truth as idea.[34] He contended that the particular objective form of language could be severed from the teaching it conveyed since that form had no connection with the meaning. Words were merely vehicles to carry ideas; simply signs which could be altered and improved upon by the light of "Divine Reason."

Bushnell rejected Coleridge's notion that the "husk" of words could be separated from the "grain" of truth. He found Coleridge's conception of language to be no more

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[34]Coleridge, Confessions of an Inquiring Spirit, p. 62.

satisfactory for theology than that of Locke or Edwards. As idealists, the Transcendentalists assumed the trans-historical character of truth. They believed truth to be separable from the human or contingent conditioning of particular expressions. Bushnell did not challenge the idea that truth might ultimately be of a trans-historical nature. However, he maintained that the only "truth" or knowledge available to man had to be acquired exclusively through historically conditioned experience. Moreover, such knowledge as man might attain could only be expressed through language. It followed for Bushnell that the problem of theology was to understand language as the expression of human experience. Words could not be considered merely as denotative signs referring to some object to be signified; rather they were symbols in that they were capable of evoking in the receptive mind the experience which they sought to express. To the extent that they aroused some response, e.g., feelings or sentiments, words as symbols might be said to participate in as well as derive their meaning from the experience which they mediated. By the same token, symbolic language required a common experience to be intelligible.[35] Thus, while Bushnell accepted Coleridge's theory that theological language was poetic, he differed with the latter's idea that form was separable from meaning. Symbolic language forms,

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[35]Bushnell, God in Christ, p. 23.

Bushnell held to be necessary for the communication of religious experience. He held that forms comprised part of the subjective meaning. Therefore, Bushnell discarded Coleridge's idea that theological language consisted of "unripe" or transitory forms. Bushnell acknowledged the necessary relativity of all human knowledge whether mediate or immediate as a condition of human finitude.

Coleridge's concept of "divine authority" in Christianity had some influence on Bushnell. Coleridge took the position that there was a dual testimony to "truth" in the Christian experience. On the one hand there was the subjective aspect which amounted to an internal cognition accommodated to our "nature and needs." On the other hand, complimentary to the subjective, was the objective "historical evidence" grounded in the existence of the Christian community.[36] Here Bushnell found an analogy and confirmation for the idea of mediate and immediate knowledge which he had discovered in Jonathan Edwards. It was that subjective-objective polarity of experience which later became the experimental analogy in the formulation of his work on Nature and the Supernatural.[37]

At this point it should be possible to render an account of Coleridge's influence on Bushnell. There can be

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[36]Coleridge, Confessions of an Inquiring Spirit, p. 64.

[37]Horace Bushnell, Nature and the Supernatural (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1895), pp. 42-43.

no question of the English poet-theologian's impact on Bushnell's conception of language as a "two-story" structure capable of expressing both subjective and objective knowledge. But, it appears to be equally clear that Coleridge exerted little direct influence beyond his contribution to linguistics. Even on that score, Bushnell differed from Coleridge with respect to the relation of language forms to meaning. Bushnell maintained that the forms of language were as much a part of meaning as the subjective experience which they sought to express contrary to Coleridge's belief that forms were unrelated to subjective meaning. Further, Bushnell rejected Coleridge's postulate of an interior "Divine Reason" as the source of subjective meaning, on the ground that it not only destroyed the distinction between the human and divine, it required an a priori assumption which could not be supported by his epistemology.[38] While Bushnell welcomed Coleridge's idea that there were two (subjective and objective) levels of knowledge which provided dual testimony to Christian truth, the fact remains that Bushnell was already relatively familiar with those concepts having discovered them outlined in the thought of Jonathan Edwards. The verdict must be that apart from his concept of language as a "two-story" structure, Coleridge made few

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[38]The question of Bushnell's quarrel with the "Divine Reason" on metaphysical grounds will be discussed in greater detail below. See pp. 59-61.

direct contributions to the thought of Horace Bushnell.

Perhaps more important to Bushnell's theology than any direct intellectual influence that he might have received from Coleridge, was the spirit the latter expressed. Coleridge expressed the importance of the immediate subjective experience of human existence (the germs of which Bushnell had discerned in Edwards' "sense of the heart") in the words: "Christianity is not a theory or a speculation; but a life;--not a philosophy of life, but a life and a living process."[39] In the same vein, Bushnell remarked that theology "is interpretation made by experience. . . . It is not a doctrine or system of doctrine, but a Living State,--a condition of germinative force and ever extending growth."[40]

While Bushnell found much in New England Transcendentalism to which he took exception, the fundamental issue which divided him from them was their metaphysical assumptions. The Transcendentalists remained convinced that there was a realm of truth or reality which lay beyond (transcended) the world of empirical knowledge. They further maintained that the ideal or universal truth had been distorted by human understanding throughout history.

> The stream of Christianity as men receive it, has caught a stain from every soil it has filtered through, so now

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[39]Coleridge, Aids to Reflection, p. 233.

[40]Bushnell, Christ in Theology, p. 83.

> it is not the pure water from the well of life which is offered to our lips, but streams troubled and polluted by man with mire and dirt.[41]

Bushnell refused to concern himself with the question of the metaphysical nature of the ideal or universal truth which might lay behind the forms of cultural institutions and language. Because human beings were finite, all truth relevant to human beings had to be conditioned by the finitude of time and space. Since Bushnell was committed to the belief that no truth or reality could be assumed which could not be supported by epistemological evidence, he believed that there could be no such thing as "pure water" accessible to human knowledge. As he remarked: "There is no such thing . . . as getting clear of form in human language."[42]

It was because of his firm conviction that no knowledge was admissible which could not be sustained epistemologically that Bushnell consistently opposed the Transcendentalist postulate of some inner mode of perception. Whether it was Coleridge's "Divine Reason" or some theory of an intuitive or instinctual ability to perceive "the universal and permanent truth amid an imperfect and miserable theology . . ."[43] Bushnell stoutly resisted the temptation to succumb to idealism. He held tenaciously to the belief that the "perceptive power" of the spiritual life was a gift

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[41] Ibid.

[42] Ibid., p. 51.

[43] Parker, in Smith, et al., p. 142.

of God's grace in the redemptive process.[44]

The question of the distinction between the human and the divine together with the associated problem of man's apprehension of the divine was another important point of contention which divided the Transcendentalists from the historic Calvinist orthodoxy. The Transcendentalists argued that because man had some subjective faculty of perception, be it "Divine Reason," intuition, or instinct, it was possible for man to be virtuous through his own strength.[45] Bushnell summed up their position as he understood it.

> The popular literature of our time, represented by such writers as Carlisle and Emerson, is in similar vein; not always denying sin, for to lose it would be to lose the spice and spirit of half the representations of humanity; but contriving rather to exalt and glorify it, by placing both it and virtue upon a common footing of a natural use and necessity.[46]

The Calvinists, to the contrary, held stubbonly to the position that because sin had discolored and warped the "nature" of man, "virtue" could only be an externally acquired attribute or gift of God.[47] While he may have had other quarrels with his orthodox contemporaries, on this subject

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[44]Bushnell, God in Christ, p. 92.

[45]Ralph Waldo Emerson, Essays: First Series (Philadelphia: David McKay [n.d.]), pp. 73-74.

[46]Bushnell, Nature and the Supernatural, p. 34.

[47]Augustine stated the Orthodox position of the church saying that man by himself is "non posse non peccare."

Bushnell took his stand with them.[48]

Bushnell generally sympathized with the Transcendentalists in their desire to undermine the authority of dogma as a norm for belief. He further shared their search for a subjective appreciation of Christianity which might liberate it from the stylized forms and institutions which had become irrelevant to human life. Often Bushnell's arguments and language made him appear to be sympathetic with some of the tenets of Transcendentalism. At least so it seemed to some of his orthodox colleagues to their discomfort. Indeed, the displeasure which Bushnell occasioned in orthodox circles led to a hearing before the General Congregational Association of Connecticut to determine whether, in fact, he was a Transcendentalist. In his defense, Bushnell said:

> Let me say for your comfort, that I have not the slightest tendency that way. I hold the fall and depravity of man with a deeper meaning, certainly than most of you, and believe as much the absolute necessity of his renewal by the Holy Spirit.[49]

It would be safe to conclude that Bushnell himself fairly stated his position with respect to Transcendentalism when he remarked that he had "not the slightest tendency that way." Other than his indebtedness to Coleridge with respect to certain of the latter's linguistic concepts,

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[48]Bushnell, Christ in Theology, p. 13.

[49]Cheney, Life and Letters, p. 236.

Bushnell owed little to and had little in common with the Transcendentalism of his era. His premise that metaphysics had to be derived from and grounded in epistemology rather than the reverse, foreclosed any community of interest between himself and the idealists. Bushnell criticized both the Transcendentalists and the orthodox theologians on the ground that they started from metaphysical presuppositions.

> We are trying and have for centuries, to hold Christianity up in the lap of logic, reason, science, and the natural understanding, and the poor thing dwindles,--inconsequent, impotent, a show that has lost out the substance. The question now is whether it can live.[50]

It was his desire to make Christianity live which impelled Horace Bushnell to consider language as the foundation upon which to build his epistemology.

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[50] Ibid., pp. 358-359.

PART II

APPROACH TO THEOLOGY:

THE RELATION OF LINGUISTIC PRINCIPLES TO EPISTEMOLOGY

CHAPTER III

LANGUAGE: ITS ORIGIN AND NATURE

Horace Bushnell was the heir to significant developments in linguistics and aesthetics in the late eighteenth century. Much of the debate of this period centered around the relation of language and thought. In large part the intense interest in language was the consequence of the growing concern with "psychology."[1] From another viewpoint, language as a medium of expression was intimately associated with the effort to elaborate a philosophy of aesthetics.[2] Increasingly, during the late eighteenth century, poetry as an art form turned away from the effort to communicate ideas to the poetic image as the source of ideas.

One significant trend initiated around the middle of

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[1]Herbert Dieckmann, "Diderot's Conception of Genius," Journal of the History of Ideas, II (April, 1941), 154. The term "psychology" in this context does not imply the modern idea of a behavioral science. In the eighteenth century what passed for psychology was speculative (philosophy) explanation of the mental processes.

[2]Herbert Dieckmann, "Esthetic Theory and Criticism in the Enlightenment," in Robert Moellenauer, ed., Introduction to Modernity (Austin, Texas: University of Texas Press, 1965), p. 66; Ernst Cassirer, The Philosophy of the Enlightenment, Fritz C. A. Koelln, and James P. Pettegrove, trans. (Boston: Beacon Press, 1955), Ch. VII, passim.

the eighteenth century was the tendency to oppose the feelings and emotions to the reason.[3] On the one hand, it was a manifestation of the growing subjectivism of the age. On the other, it expressed the growing concern of the philosophers, e.g., Hume in England and Condillac in France, with the "passions" or emotions in motivating man. There was a growing sentiment that man had to look to inward experience as the source of knowledge.[4] For some of the romantics the internal world was the world of reality as opposed to the external world of appearances. The Transcendentalist Friedrich Schelling was not alone in his belief that man could have an immediate experience of knowledge, of moral truth.[5] In the field of aesthetic criticism, the idea that the work of art represented the inner mode of knowledge led to the mounting conviction that the work of artistic genius could

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[3]Dieckmann, "Diderot's Conception of Genius," p. 154; Lester G. Crocker, An Age of Crisis (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1959), pp. xviii, 8.

[4]For examples of the trend see: Henry F. Majewski, "Genius and Poetry in the Pre-romantic Imagination of L.-S. Mercier," Romanic Review, LVII (October, 1966), 180; Philip P. Hallie, "Hume, Biran and the Meditatifs Interieurs," Journal of the History of Ideas, XVIII (June, 1957), 295-312 passim.; Karl Barth, From Rousseau to Ritschl, Brian Cozens, trans. (London: S. C. M. Press Ltd., 1959), p. 239, quotes Novalis: "The secret path leads inward. Eternity with its worlds, the past and the future, is within us, or nowhere."

[5]Arthur O. Lovejoy, The Reason, the Understanding and Time (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1961), pp. 55, 59.

not be explained rationally.[6]

Given the increasing subjectivism of the late eighteenth century, the preoccupation with the internal facets of life, the problem became one of explaining the interior realm's operation and expression. Before the intuitionists proposed their solution to the question, there had emerged a theory of imagination as a creative faculty. In large part the notion that the imagination might be the source of truth was an outgrowth of the increasing awareness of the limits of the "calculating understanding." In France, the influential editor of the Encyclopedie, Denis Diderot, concluded that the "imagination" was important in the formation of ideas; that what distinguished the genius from the ordinary run of men was the possession of imagination to a superior degree.[7] A somewhat minor late eighteenth century literary heir of Diderot, one Louis-Sebastien Mercier, went beyond his mentor and thought of the imagination as a magical and supernatural faculty which enabled the poet to suggest the real unity between the physical and spiritual realms.[8]

There were similar developments in England. Bishop

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[6]Dieckmann, "Diderot's Conception of Genius," pp. 173-174; R. Wittkower, "Omitation, Eclecticism and Genius," in Earl R. Wasserman, ed., Aspects of the Eighteenth Century (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1965), pp. 157-158.

[7]Dieckmann, "Esthetic Theory and Criticism in the Enlightenment," p. 96.

[8]Majewski, p. 181.

Berkley and David Hume had done much to make their countrymen conscious of the limitations of empiricism. Where earlier in the eighteenth century the tendency had been to regard the analytic faculty, i.e., the understanding, as superior to the synthetic faculty, i.e., the imagination, the trend changed after the middle of that century.[9] Illustrative of that change was the writing of Abraham Tucker, The Light of Nature Pursued (1768-1778) in which the author maintained that the imagination provided an immediate awareness of self-evident truth.[10] Before his conversion to Transcendental Idealism, Coleridge believed not only in the "truth of the imagination," but in the power of the imagination to communicate with the life and sensibility in nature.[11]

A consequence of the rising estimation of the imagination as well as the growth of "associational psychology" (Hume and Hartley in England, and Condillac in France) with its attempt to derive the mental faculties from the data of sensation, there was an increasing interest in the nature of language. Locke, and before him Hobbes and Bacon, had

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[9]W. P. Albrecht, Hazlitt and the Creative Imagination (Lawrence, Kansas: University of Kansas Press, 1965), pp. 65-69.

[10]Cited in ibid., p. 69.

[11]An excellent study of the evolution of the so-called "romantic" theory of the imagination can be found in: H. W. Piper, The Active Universe (London: The University of London, The Athlone Press, 1962), p. 124.

pointed the way by assuming that the mental process of reason involved the manipulation of "signs" or "images."[12] Condillac found the origin and development of language to be the "secret" to his attempt to derive the "higher faculties" from the data of sensation.[13] By the late eighteenth century the idea that the function of the imagination was the making of images was "in the air."[14] The notion that symbol and myth were the instruments of poetry and the arts was widespread.[15]

From the foregoing discussion it is apparent that Bushnell was not alone in his contention that words were capable of expressing subjective as well as objective content. He lived during an age which was as concerned with the poetic character of language as it was with the rational or formal nature of linguistics. While Bushnell appeared to have read widely among the philologists and linguistic philosophers of his day, he found them all to be inadequate in dealing with language as an expression of immediate subjec-

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[12]Locke's theory of language is too well known to cite here. For a recent study of its function in Locke's philosophy see: Robert L. Armstrong, "John Locke's 'Doctrine of Signs': A New Metaphysics," Journal of the History of Ideas, XXVI (July-September, 1965), pp. 3, 369-382.

[13]Dieckmann, "Esthetic Theory and Criticism in the Enlightenment," pp. 87-90.

[14]For examples to illustrate, see: Majewski, p. 181; Albrecht, p. 69; Dieckmann, "Esthetic Theory and Criticism in the Enlightenment," p. 90.

[15]Ballard, "On the Nature of Romanticism," p. 87.

tive experience.[16] Accordingly, he turned his back on them and set out to develop his own theory of the "significance" of language in theology. There is little evidence that he received direct influence from or was conscious of any dependence on others.

At the outset, it is important to recognize the limitations which Bushnell imposed upon himself regarding his analysis of language. He never intended to develop a comprehensive and sophisticated system of linguistics. Indeed, he did not feel competent to undertake such an onerous task.[17] He was concerned with plumbing the depths of the origin and nature of language to the extent that he felt necessary for his purposes. He sought to demonstrate two points: that language had both a "literal" and "figurative" level, and that on the figurative or intellectual level there was an analogical relation between words and subjective experience.[18] Once he had established those contentions, he hoped to build a theological epistemology which would enable theologians to express the immediate knowledge of subjective experience. By establishing the limitations and possibilities of the figurative level of language, Bushnell felt that he could untangle the lines of the current theological controversies. He described what he thought to

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[16]Bushnell, God in Christ, pp. 12-43.

[17]Ibid., p. 12

[18]Ibid., p. 97.

be the difficulty in contemporary theological language.

> The subject of which I speak, is language: a very different instrument, certainly, from what most men think it to be, and one, which if they understood more exactly, they would use it more wisely. In the misuse and abuse of this instrument, a great part of our religious difficulties have their spring. We have misconceived, as it seems to me, both its nature and its capacities, and our moral reasonings are, just to the same extent, infected with error. Indeed, it is such an instrument, that I see not how anyone, who rightly conceives its nature, can hope any longer to produce in it a real and proper system of dogmatic truth. He will doubt the capacity of language to serve any such purpose. He will also suspect that our logical or deductive processes under it, are more likely, in general, to be false than true. And yet, in the matter of Christian doctrine, or Christian theology, we are found committing ourselves most unsuspectingly to language and logic, as if the instrument were sufficient and method infallible.[19]

Bushnell proceeded in his analysis of the origin of language to distinguish two steps in its development. There was a "noun-language" which was merely the naming of physical actions and objects to which the senses of two or more observers had been directed. Noun-language was comprised of sounds which, by agreement, represented specified objects or actions. Such a language however, was not adequate to deal with all of the experience of human existence. It did not provide a means for communication of those thoughts or emotions which lay beyond purely physical sensation. Therefore, another kind of language had developed in human communication enabling men to express emotion and ideas "which under an outward form, carries an inward sense . . ."[20]

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[19] Ibid., p. 11-12. [20] Ibid., p. 21.

That other language expressed its meaning in poetic and symbolic forms. Thus, Bushnell believed that the linguistic solution to the problem of communicating these inward and subjective experiences was the great problem which plagued theology.

"Intellectual" or "figurative" language was an external form developed to mediate thought and emotion between persons. The form, which could be an action, object, or word, consciously or unconsciously became associated with a state of mind or emotion which was derived from a common historical experience. It followed then, that words originated in and derived their meaning from the context of the contingent and historical experience of human culture. By way of illustration: through gestures and involuntary reactions, the body becomes the outward expression of the internal feeling. Thus, emotions such as shame, guilt, or embarrassment were mirrored outwardly by blushing. That expression could be understood readily by other persons who were sufficiently close in cultural background and experience. In the same way that the body mirrored feelings, Bushnell thought words possessed a psychological relationship to the emotions which they expressed.[21] Words were symbolic of the way one felt about his actions. The symbols for sin and evil, for example, were most generally depicted

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[21] Ibid., p. 23.

by crooked lines, while honesty and integrity were usually thought of as straight. "Why a crooked line, which is the more graceful in itself, should not have been the natural instinct, and so the symbol of the right, as it now is of the wrong?"[22] Thus Bushnell tried to show the relational character of outward signs to the inward thought of man. He pointed out that when man was deceitful, he employed devious methods which in actual experience were best symbolized by a crooked line. When one had nothing to hide, he did not need to cover up deceit by retracing his steps. Accordingly, a straight line best symbolized his action in experience.

From such relatively crude conceptions of philological origins, Bushnell developed his argument for an analogous relationship between the outward, objective world of things and the internal, subjective realm of experience. The external, objective order was the sphere of language while the inner, subjective world was the domain of human feeling or thought. Bushnell rejected the idea that the relationship (between the external and internal) was a conscious construct of the human mind. He was aware that the positing of a metaphysical ground for the relationship would jeopardize his conviction that epistemology was primary to metaphysics. Consequently he did not make metaphysical assumptions the base for his linguistic theory.

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[22] Ibid., p. 29.

Yet, he felt as a matter of belief rather than knowledge, that there was a transcendant "logos" or reason which ordered both the objective and subjective realms and from which both took their ground. There was ample precedent for Bushnell's position. In some respects it could be regarded as a restatement of a modified conception of Aquinas' "way of analogy" in which the effect resembled the cause. Moreover, Medieval scholastics had used an "analogy of proportionality" to demonstrate the reality and validity of spiritual concepts from the observation of material cause and effect. Practitioners of the "analogy of proportionality," for example, started from the observation that system or order were effects of intelligent cause and, by analogy, moved to speculation concerning the supreme intelligence as the cause of the observable cosmic order. In a somewhat similar manner, Bushnell set forth his speculative hypothesis for the existence of God. He believed that the recognition of the relationship between thought and form in human experience was "sufficient of itself" to produce the thought of God in the mind.

> If the outer world is the vast dictionary and grammar of thought we speak of, then it is also itself an organ throughout of intelligence. Whose intelligence? By this question we are set directly confronting God.[23]

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[23] Ibid., p. 30. It might be interesting to note some similarity in Bushnell's conception of the relationship between the objective and the subjective as well as the relationship between each and the transcendental logos, to thought of Spinoza. Spinoza was concerned with the problem

Although Bushnell accepted the belief that God's being was the logos or reason underlying both subjective and objective forms, he avoided making that premise a part of his linguistic theory. He recognized that he had made an assumption which could not be supported by his epistemology. Therefore, he refused to become involved in the scholastic arguments concerning primary metaphysical realities. He remarked:

> Here we come to our limit. All we can say is, that by a mystery transcending in any case our comprehension, the Divine Logos, who is in the world, weaves into nature types or images that have an inscrutable relation to mind and thought. On the one hand, is form; on the other, is the formless. The former represents, and is somehow fellow to, the other; how, we cannot discover. . . . If we say that the forms of the reason answer to the forms of nature and the outward life, that is true; but then there are no forms in the reason, save by a figure of speech, and the difficulty still remains.[24]

Thus, Bushnell saved himself from foundering on the shoals toward which he had been previously headed by navigating a course away from metaphysical speculation.

In a sense, he was struggling with the same diffi-

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of the relationship between mind and matter and proposed to transcend both by making each a mode or attribute of the infinite. Thus, he could account for the action of mind on matter (e.g., bodily organism) by assuming the ground of relationship to lay in the infinite of which each was a mode. It should be noted, however, that Bushnell did not accept a pantheistic position. For a discussion of Spinoza's position on this matter see: Hans Jonas, "Spinoza and the Theory of Organism," The Journal of the History of Philosophy, III (April, 1965), 43-57.

[24] Ibid., p. 43.

culty which had confronted Immanuel Kant. In his Critique of Pure Reason, Kant had faced the question of metaphysical knowledge and had concluded that the human understanding could not have access to the reality which lay beyond appearances. While there remains some confusion regarding Kant's handling of the so-called "transcendental analytic," it is generally agreed that he assumed the existence of a priori categories of the "understanding" (conceived as a cognitive faculty) which ordered the sense impressions that entered through the organs of perception. However, Kant accepted the fact that the ordering of sensation, e.g., the perception of objects in space or time, was a subjective process which took place within the intellect. He recognized that the sensory input to the understanding provided only knowledge of appearances. Of the "thing-in-itself" which might lay behind the appearances, we could have no direct knowledge of an empirical order. And, since it is evident that he did not consider the "practical reason" to be an organ of perception, it is reasonably clear that Kant, like Bushnell, rejected metaphysical statements as knowledge apart from the perception of the understanding, i.e., as prior to and a base for epistemology.[25]

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[25]While they discuss this question from rather special points of view, i.e., the practical consequences of Kant's limitation of the original data of cognition to phenomena, two interesting analyses of his philosophy which are concerned with his belief that the understanding cannot acquire metaphysical knowledge are: G. B. Mathur, "Hume and

By assuming the a priori character of the categories of the understanding, however, Kant had weakened his argument for excluding metaphysical knowledge and had opened the door to idealism. Bushnell avoided that pitfall. He could not assume the a priori nature of the categories of the understanding because he could see no epistemological basis upon which he could preclude the opposite possibility, i.e., that the categories were conditioned by the form(s) of the object of perception. There was the further possibility that underlying both the object of perception and the categories of the understanding was the "Logos" or "being itself." All those possibilities had been and continued to be proposed as a solution to the problem of the relationship between the subjective-objective phenomena of experience. However, Bushnell perceived that such speculation could not explain the question of knowledge regarding the subject-object relationship. Since he did not consider the matter to be one which could be dealt with in terms of knowledge, Bushnell saw no reason to become involved in the discussion. Thus, he felt that questions of origin and cause were irrelevant to theology. He contented himself with the observation that there was an empirically observable relationship between the form of language and the internal and subjective

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Kant in Their Relation to the Pragmatic Movement," Journal of the History of Ideas, XVI (April, 1955), 198-208, and Leonard Krieger, "Kant and the Crisis of Natural Law," Journal of the History of Ideas, XXVI (April-June, 1965), 191-210.

thought or emotion connected with it.

Bushnell believed that symbols arose in a family or community where there was sufficient mutuality of experience and feeling to permit a common understanding.[26] Under such circumstances, the experience of an historical event might be mediated in all its emotional overtones by a word or symbol. However, words as symbols lost their power to evoke an image when they were dissociated from the experience of the event. A case in point would be the loss of the affective power of words which had been removed from the community or family to the broader base of a society at large. Such accidental symbols could have meaning only to the extent that they were associated with a universal or common experience of human beings. This process has been called by Martin Foss the action of "metaphoric expansion."[27] Bushnell gave evidence that he recognized the operation of this phenomena in language by pointing out that words were only names of genera and not of specific objects. Most words had undergone this universal transformation and no longer

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[26]Bushnell, God in Christ, p. 18.

[27]The physical and mental sensations which are common to all men replace the particular sensations experienced in the origin of the symbol. In the process of transfer from "accidental" to "universal" symbol there is the danger of the loss of the meaning of the initiating experience of the original observers. See Martin Foss, Symbol, Metaphor and Human Experience (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1949), pp. 34-36 and Erich Fromm, The Forgotten Language (New York: Rhinehart and Company, 1951), p. 18.

represented any unique or particular action or thought.[28] They related only to the general "sensations of sight, touch, taste, smell, hearing . . ."[29] In fact, as Bushnell observed, most words relating to a particular inner feeling "are only hints, or images, held up before the mind of another, to put him on generating or reproducing the same thought. . . ."[30] Bushnell further cautioned against depending upon words as universal symbols of thought. While they had their universal meaning, at the same time they conveyed some particular idea or feeling of a particular individual. Thus they "affirm something which is false and contrary to the truth intended."[31] It followed that there was always some ambiguity in the universal meaning of a word arising from the fact that it was simultaneously trying to deliver a particular subjective idea, and a general objective idea in the same form. The objective and literal definition of a word which constituted its universal meaning was much easier to grasp than the subjective meaning which had become associated with the word in its original cultural setting. The subjective meaning had a tendency to become

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[28]The 18th century French philosopher Condillac held a similar view but there is no evidence of any direct influence on Bushnell. See Herbert Dieckmann, "Esthetic Theory and Criticism in the Enlightenment."

[29]Bushnell, God in Christ, p. 43. Bushnell remarks that he was influenced in this idea by Alexander Bryan Johnson, A Treatise on Language: or the Relation Which Words Bear to Things (New York, 1836).

[30]Ibid., p. 46. [31]Ibid., p. 48.

obscured not only by the obvious objective meaning, but also because of unfamiliarity with its historical symbolism.

When Bushnell used the term "truth" it should be understood that he did not intend to imply any absolute or ultimate definitional content. Since he regarded the human understanding to be contingent with respect to time and space, truth for him had reference only to the particular subjective meaning which one perceived in an event or idea. In theological language, the expression of truth in an objective form was simply a device to facilitate communication. Thus, "definitions" conceived as the objective meaning of words were not to be trusted since such definitions were too easily understood as abstractions. Such definitions themselves tended to obscure the need for the more difficult understanding of the symbolic and subjective content. Given his philological presuppositions, the reason Bushnell regarded the effort to discern absolute or abstract truth as futile if not irrelevant should be evident. Even where they do exist, ultimate truths could not be communicated.[32]

Bushnell's objection to the expression of abstract truth did not end with his criticism of the problem from the point of view of definitional content. He was equally opposed to any effort to arrive at truth by disembodying it

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[32]Bushnell, Christ in Theology, p. 51.

and divorcing it from form. Any such attempt he held to be a deception which could succeed in doing nothing other than producing a false understanding of human communication. Accordingly, Bushnell insisted that the Transcendentalists were mistaken when, in their reaction to Orthodoxy, their idealism led them to distrust forms in the communication of truth.

> What are called definitions in theology and metaphysics are generally nothing better than preparations for a plentiful harvest of errors . . . being commonly drawn in the most abstract language possible, they are supposed to have absolute meanings clear of form and figure; when they are just as truly under form and figure as the wildest rhapsodies, only that the figure has been staled by time, and is therefore less palpable.[33]

On the other hand, Bushnell was just as opposed to Protestant scholasticism which he feared was guilty of idolizing form at the expense of the meaning to be expressed by the form. He remained firm in the conviction that man could have no knowledge of the absolute apart from the mediation of human actions and language.

Once Bushnell had established the limitations of language in relation to expression, he turned to explore what he believed were the possibilities of the linguistic expression of subjective experience. He was optimistic that once the function and use of language were understood, it might become a useful means of expressing inner experience. A new language should not be constructed, but rather, the

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[33]Bushnell, God in Christ, p. 51.

one received from culture should be better understood:

> If instead of occupying our "dying thoughts," and our conceptions of "other life" with conjectures of some better medium that will deliver us from the obscurity and limitations of this, we could simply turn ourselves to the practical question, by what abuses and perversion we become involved in so great confusion of doctrine, and reduce ourselves to so great poverty in truth, we should discover that there is truth enough to be known here, and truth enough expressed,--only provided we had eyes to see it.[34]

Because of his conviction that language was not an arbitrary tool of reason, Bushnell was prepared to consider language as he found it as a source of meaning. Despite all the problems and inconsistencies it posed for communication, he believed that because language was a product of human culture, it should be investigated as such. Only then could it yield its secrets about human subjective experience.

Bushnell believed that there must be a principle or method by which one could distinguish the meaning of words without permitting their form to distort the expression. It was most probably coincidence that he discovered a methodology in paradox at approximately the same time that the Dane, Soren Kierkegaard utilized a similar approach.[35] Bushnell found that when the forms of expression which related to a particular experience were multiplied, their objective mean-

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[34] Ibid., p. 37.

[35] Kierkegaard published first in 1843 and Bushnell wrote God in Christ in 1849. There is no evidence that Kierkegaard's works were known to, or had any influence on Bushnell.

ings were usually in conflict. However, the contradiction itself pointed to a meaning beyond the expression of either form by itself. The logically conflicting or contradictory forms cancelled each other out and brought the process of formal logic to a halt. The only alternative from the point of view of formal logic was to declare that one of the forms or statements was false, or by retracing the process from the beginning, make the forms of the statements agree. Formal logic could not tolerate genuine paradox and indeed, declared against its possibility. Bushnell, on the other hand, saw no profit in discussing the possibility of ultimate paradox. He simply pointed out that all linguistic forms and statements conveyed truth and untruth, that is, they were relative and approximate.[36] Thus even if one were able to break the paradoxical forms by manipulating them into agreement, one still had only managed to solve a problem involving the mere mechanical relationship of external expression. The true meaning, in terms of human feeling, could not be revealed by the reduction of paradox to a logical solution of a formal nature.

Once he had dismissed the value of dealing with paradox objectively, e.g., in terms of formal logic, Bushnell turned to a subjective approach to the problem. As noted above, Bushnell, like Kierkegaard, thought that "truth

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[36]Bushnell, God in Christ, pp. 48-49.

is subjectivity" and believed that objective or definitive meanings of words were abstractions which were futile in that they did not apply to any particular human being.

> While abstract thought seeks to understand the concrete abstractly, the subjective thinker has conversely to understand the abstract concretely. Abstraction turns from concrete men to consider men in general; the subjective thinker seeks to understand the abstract determination of being human in terms of this peculiar existing human being.[37]

Bushnell's assumption that paradox could only be understood subjectively was a consequence of his belief that symbols representing human experience took their origin within the context of culture. It followed that if one were to grasp their particular and deeper meaning, i.e., their subjective meaning, they had to be considered as products of human culture. Bushnell would most certainly have agreed with Kierkegaard's remark that, "Even in his moment of abstract thought, the abstract thinker exists in spite of his abstraction."[38] Paradox then, like all symbols of experience, had to be considered in its contradiction if its meaning was to be understood. The meaning of human experience could only be found in language if the polarity of paradox could be apprehended by a method which went beyond

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[37]Soren Kierkegaard, Concluding Unscientific Postscript (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1941), p. 242.

[38]Ibid., p. 170.

the mere logical manipulation of forms.[39] Bushnell did not claim novelty for his approach and candidly observed that he was following in the footsteps of Pascal and the Apostle Paul in his use of paradox as a linguistic tool.[40]

It should be kept in mind that Bushnell found value in the use of paradox because he observed it as an actual phenomenon in human expression. He further noted that the paradoxical situation occurred when one tried to speak of a particular subjective experience. Paradox, for Bushnell as well as Kierkegaard, was not something to be resolved, but rather was to be considered as a means of attaining knowledge.[41] If one were to describe a person as being "naively wise" or "cynically enthusiastic," for example, he would be endeavoring to describe the singularity or uniqueness of that person. If only the terms "wise" or "enthusiastic" were used in the description, one would assign the person to the universal and abstract categories of wise or enthusias-

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[39]Here as elsewhere there is a similarity between Bushnell's thought and that of Kierkegaard. Bushnell though thought that since forms were relative, one could not "manufacture truth by inferences drawn out of the forms, but (one must) find truth in them by a simple and delicately receptive contemplation of them." (Christ in Theology, p. 39) Compare that position with Kierkegaard's statement that: "Man does not become logic because he thinks logically, he therefore, must exist in other categories" (Concluding Unscientific Postscript, p. 85).

[40]Bushnell, God in Christ, pp. 55-56.

[41]J. V. L. Casserley, The Christian in Philosophy (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1954), p. 180.

tic people as commonly understood. In that sense, paradoxical form was useful to "generate" or suggest a specific meaning which lay beyond the general and obvious understanding of the words. In terms of an objective, definitive analysis, such a paradox was an absurdity. It had to be understood as a poetic device which could only appeal to the emotional, internal experience of the individual. Bushnell illustrated what he meant by his use of paradox as a device to permit the derivation of meaning from contradictory language by saying:

> All words are, in fact only incarnations, or insensings of thought. If we investigate the relations of their forms to the truths signified, we have the same mystery before us; if we set the different, but related forms in comparison, we have the same aspect of repugnance or inconsistency. And then we have only to use the repugnant forms as vehicles of pure thought, dismissing the contradictory matters of the forms, and both words and the Word are understood without distraction,--all by the same process.[42]

Bushnell's words in the above passage may appear flippant and naive. The phrase, "vehicles of pure thought" seems a bit inconsistent, not to mention optimistic in relation to any word, especially in the light of the grave warnings given previously. But his point that attention should be focused upon the unique meaning suggested to the "imagination" by the collision of conflicting forms was central to the development of his own expression.[43]

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[43]Bushnell, God in Christ, pp. 55-56.

[44]Ibid., p. 57.

Bushnell did not make the distinction between complementary and supplementary forms of paradox even though both forms were evident in his thought. The complementary form, whose two premises were truly contradictory, was discussed above. That type of paradox was basic to the statement of the creeds in the doctrines of Incarnation and Trinity. Supplementary paradox, on the contrary, originated through a combination of two apparently contradictory statements which, upon proper analysis were either seen to have stated the same thing or to have become ambiguous.[44] It was that latter category of paradox which, according to Bushnell, explained why much theology appeared to be contradictory. In the development of his method which he called "comprehensiveness," Bushnell had to deal with factions in his congregation who stated their positions in a manner which formed a false antithesis. The conservatives asserted that God's sovereignty was violated by an acceptance of revivalism as a means of grace outside the proper channels of the visible church. The liberals, in the same deductive fashion, argued that God's sovereignty was violated by the restriction of the free operation of the Holy Spirit. Bushnell pointed out that both positions had seized upon a true aspect of God's sovereignty. But, in their use of deductive

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[44]Henning Schröer, Die Denkform der Paradoxalität als theologisches Problem (Gottingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 1960), p. 45.

methodology, both sides had allowed only one statement of the truth with the result that their positions appeared to be contradictory. Having demonstrated the error of choosing one proposition to communicate any particular idea or emotion, Bushnell went on to point out that language had to "be ever trying to mend its own deficiencies by multiplying its forms of representation."[45] It was that approach which made it possible for him to effect a reconciliation among the contesting members of his congregation.[46]

Because of the poetic character of his expression, Bushnell's statements often seemed more radical in meaning than they were intended to be. One factor which motivated Bushnell to employ a poetic style in his writing was the hope that he would thereby free his expressions from being taken literally. He believed that a poetic style would require his readers to move to a symbolic and subjective understanding. He recombined word-symbols which he found in cultural language and tended to ignore the dictionary. In so doing, he attempted to create a method of expression which would arrest attention and suggest a creative approach

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[45]Bushnell, God in Christ, p. 55.

[46]Cheney, Life and Letters, p. 280. Although there is no direct evidence of the words which Bushnell used to solve this controversy, it is reasonable to believe that his linguistic principles demanded that propositional statements concerning the sovereignty of God were ambiguous as expressing the complete subjective impression of this idea.

to the understanding of Christianity. He described his method of writing as:

> . . . The making of language, and not a going to the dictionary. I have dared sometimes to put myself out on liberty. Finding the air full of things about me, buoyant all and free, I have let them come under and lift. The second, third, and thirtieth senses of words --all but the physical first sense--belong to the empyrean and are given, as we see in the prophets, to be inspired by. Of course they must be genuinely used and in their nature, and not contrary to it. We learn to embark on them as we do when we go to sea; and when the breeze of inspiration occurs, we glide.[47]

In employing what appeared to be a rather unsophisticated and careless poetic style, it is not surprising that Bushnell was ridiculed and held in contempt by many of the serious theologians of his day. It is understandable also, considering his style, that he would complain about being misunderstood: "Almost no one of my representations has, to this moment, been set forth by the assailants of my orthodoxy, in the meaning intended by me, to be discussed according to its merits in that meaning . . ."[48] That statement was made in response to a particularly blistering attack levelled at him by Charles Hodge. Hodge, a conservative Calvinist, occupying the chair of theology at Princeton, especially disliked and distrusted the New England Theology because he felt it taught what he regarded as an erroneous view of original sin and human freedom. In the Presbyterian

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[47] Ibid., p. 209.

[48] Bushnell, Christ in Theology, p. 10.

Old School-New School controversy, the New School was greatly influenced by the New England Theology of Nathaniel Taylor. Hodge was a champion of the Old School party against the anti-slavery platform and the centralization of church government proposed by the New School. Thus, since Bushnell had been a student of Taylor's and had been suspected of heresy since the publication of Christian Nurture three years before, Hodge was prejudiced against Bushnell before he read his ideas. He became Bushnell's most caustic critic. His derogatory opinion of Bushnell's work, however, is useful as an illustration of the radical contrast in the understanding of language which divided Bushnell from conservative Orthodoxy. As Hodge put the matter:

> Because language is an imperfect vehicle of thought, no dependence can be placed upon it; there can be no such thing as a scientific theology, no definite doctrinal proposition; creeds and catechisms are not to be trusted; etc., etc. . . . This is shocking. It undermines all confidence even in the ordinary transactions of life. There can on this plan, be no treaties between nations, no binding contracts between individuals; for "the chemistry" which makes all creeds alike, will soon get what results it pleases out of any form of words that can be framed. This doctrine supposes there can be no relation from God to men, except to the imagination and feelings, none to the reason. It supposes that man by the constitution of his nature is such a failure, that he cannot certainly communicate or receive thought. The fallacy of all Dr. Bushnell's reasoning on this subject, is so transparent, that we can hardly give him credit for sincerity.[49]

Although polemic, Hodge's criticism was characteristic of

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[49]Charles F. Hodge, "Review of Dr. Bushnell's Discourses in God in Christ," Biblical Repertory and Princeton Review, XXII (April, 1849), 266.

the common contemporary conception of language as an objective, empirical tool. Hodge refused to admit any distinction between theological language and the language used in "treaties between nations" or "contracts between individuals." It was precisely the failure to make that distinction which Bushnell criticized in the Orthodox theologians. They recognized but one level of language. In his recognition of two levels of language, Bushnell did not deny the validity of empirical and definitive propositions related to objectively verifiable evidence. While such a statement as, "logic itself is a defective, and often deceitful instrument,"[50] might appear to contradict his acceptance of empirical, objective language, he was referring to the use of deductive processes in theological language, not to the language of contracts or physical phenomena. As Hodge correctly remarked, Bushnell held that he saw no possibility of a scientific theology.[51] But, he also said that "Language is not an instrument so imperfect, when rightly accepted, or used according to its real nature."[52] Thus, Bushnell attempted to clarify his contention that literal language by itself, was unable to satisfy the requirements of theological understanding.

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[50]Bushnell, God in Christ, pp. 57-58.

[51]Ibid., p. 65.

[52]Bushnell, Christ in Theology, p. 33.

The poetic nature of Bushnell's language in effect brought into question the authority of Christian creeds as statements of objective truth. Quite understandably, the orthodox theologians reacted to his work negatively. Hodge was not alone when he expressed the fear that Bushnell's linguistic theory, if taken seriously, would undermine the authority of Christian doctrine.[53] His fear was well-founded, since, in fact, Bushnell did wish to undermine the literal authority of both the creeds and scripture. Bushnell wanted to liberate Christianity from what he understood as objective authority and mechanical methods of scriptural interpretation which restricted the Christian experience of the "soul in its living nature; as free, and intelligent, and sensitive."[54]

In summary, it may be said that Bushnell developed his theory of language as a creative synthesis inspired by the two-fold nature of knowledge which he received from Jonathan Edwards' idea of the two levels of experience and Coleridge's ideas of the poetic nature of language. Bushnell moved beyond the contemporary theories of language with which he was familiar because he felt that they dealt with words only on the rational, objective level. He saw the need to develop a language which would express the subjec-

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[53]Hodge, "Bushnell's Discourses," p. 262.

[54]Cheney, Life and Letters, p. 208.

tive experience of immediate or emotional knowledge. He observed an analogical relationship between the subjective, immediate experience and the words of cultural language. For that reason, he could not allow an intellectual reduction of cultural language to rationally objective ideas. Therefore, he introduced the method of paradox as an epistemological device to permit him to avoid the reduction of linguistic forms to objective ideas and yet allow the language to generate or stimulate an emotional perception of its meaning.

Because Bushnell believed that the most important truth or knowledge in Christianity was that which one perceived immediately in the feelings, he said that truth was subjective, and that rational ideas drawn from the experience were secondary in relation to knowledge. Therefore, in theological language, Bushnell avoided the use of definitive forms of expression and attempted to develop a poetic style which he felt would appeal to the immediate subjective feeling rather than to the intellect.

With his linguistic theory as his microscope, Bushnell set out to examine the Biblical and creedal language of Christianity in order to discover hermeneutical principles which would free its symbolic and suggestive meaning to the inner experience of feeling.

CHAPTER IV

LANGUAGE IN SCRIPTURE

Bushnell's linguistic theory led him to develop hermeneutical principles which in the context of the nineteenth century New England theology were creative and original. His belief that language in propositional form was inadequate to express a balanced view of God's revelation to man kept him from accepting the common hermeneutical practices of his theological colleagues. He recognized that the Bible contained "repugnances" or "antagonistic forms of assertion" which if taken as scientific statements would "show it up as the absurdest book in the world." He rejected the methods of scriptural interpretation used by the Calvinists and Unitarians:

> Shall we say with the infidel, this is all a medley of contradiction--mere nonsense, fit only to be rejected? Shall we take up these bold antagonisms, as many orthodox believers have done, seize upon some one symbol as the real form of the truth, and compel all others to submit to it; making, thus, as many sects as there are symbols, and as many pettey wars about each truth as it has sides or inches of surface? Or shall we endeavor, with the Unitarians, to decoct the whole mass of symbol, and draw off the extract into pitchers of our own; fine consistent, nicely rounded pitchers, which, so far from setting out anywhere towards infinity, we can carry at

> pleasure by the handle, and definitely measure by the eye?[1]

Bushnell understood the obvious problem of the contradictory nature of scriptural language with which every interpreter must struggle. What concerned him were the two most popular methods of interpretation which he represented as the "orthodox" and the "Unitarian." By recognizing only the literal level of language in scripture, Calvinistic orthodoxy had forced itself into a position where its proponents had to defend the literal accuracy of the New Testament in order to uphold the authority of scripture. To accomplish that end, the orthodox had resorted to the doctrine of "verbal inspiration" and "inerrancy" to make the Biblical language appear to be the words of God. The difficulty with that approach to the understanding of scriptural language, Bushnell thought, became apparent in the literal disagreements and contradictions encountered in the New Testament. The discovery of contradictions had fostered theological wars between interpreters. In his criticism of the "orthodox" hermeneutics, Bushnell referred to the many controversies within the Calvinistic tradition over the scriptural basis of original sin,[2] as well as the growing exclusiveness

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[1]Bushnell, God in Christ, p. 69.

[2]See the discussion of these controversies in H. Shelton Smith, Changing Conceptions of Original Sin: A Study in American Theology since 1750 (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1955).

of denominationalism brought about by the concern to protect a particular interpretation which was felt to be the uniquely Christian idea.[3] Charles Hodge, an Old-School Calvinist,[4] demonstrated this attitude in an article protesting against interdenominational missionary societies whose existence he felt threatened to adulterate the "truth" of the particular denominations. Hodge argued that "every church has its peculiar system of opinions and form of government, which it is bound to preserve and extend. One of the most important duties of the church in her organized capacity is the preservation of the truth."[5] He was particularly upset by what he considered the adulteration of the "truth" of Calvinism by New-School Presbyterianism and was one of the last to give up his opposition to the Plan of Reunion of the Presbyterian Church in 1869.[6] Bushnell viewed this growing exclusiveness and lack of trust in cooperative efforts among the churches as the direct result of what he considered a false, or at least deceptive, trust in

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[3]Bushnell, Christ in Theology, p. 135.

[4]A. A. Hodge, The Life of Charles Hodge, D.D., LL.D., Professor in the Theological Seminary, Princeton, N.J. (New York, 1880).

[5]Charles Hodge, "Article Reviewing A Plea for Voluntary Societies . . .," Biblical Repertory and Princeton Review, IX (1837), 112-114.

[6]Clifford M. Drury, Presbyterian Panorama (Philadelphia: Board of Christian Education, Presbyterian Church, U.S.A., 1952), p. 167.

propositionalizing the symbols of scriptural language as the "truth" which the denominations must preserve. The method of seeing the scriptural language as literal propositions had brought about many "petty wars" and a lack of charity which he believed to be not only unnecessary but unchristian.[7]

Bushnell also reacted against the idealistic rationalism of what he called the "Unitarian" attitude, which put the scriptures in the category of human literature conveying universal ideas. That tendency, however, was to be seen more clearly in the Transcendentalism of Emerson than in the older Unitarianism. In the neo-Platonic tradition, Emerson asserted the ultimate universality and oneness of all true ideas and attempted in Bushnell's words "to decoct the whole mass of symbol, and draw off the extract." For Emerson, the forms of cult and ritual had nothing unique in themselves, but were merely historical manifestations which attempted to communicate the universal and eternal order of things which in ultimate reality were one; that is, an "identity of the law of gravitation with purity in heart."[8] While Bushnell

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[7]Horace Bushnell, "Our Gospel, A Gift to the Imagination," Building Eras in Religion (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1903), pp. 273-274.

[8]Ralph Waldo Emerson, "An Address Delivered before the Senior Class in Divinity College, Cambridge, Sunday Evening, July 15, 1838," The Complete Works of Ralph Waldo Emerson, ed. by Edward Waldo Emerson (Boston, 1903-1904), I, 149-151.

did not involve himself in this metaphysical argument, he objected to this point of view because it offered a rationalistic assumption or bias which limited the investigation of scriptural meaning. Such metaphysical ground enabled the investigator to carry away "nicely-rounded pitchers" which conformed to the conditions of his a priori assumption. But, Bushnell believed that it would not allow one to go beyond the assumption, that is, "towards infinity."[9] Bushnell tried to suspend metaphysical assumptions in his investigation, because he realized their limiting influence upon the freedom of inquiry. As noted earlier, Bushnell had discovered that one's views of language shaped his epistemology and that words themselves not only expressed what was experienced, but by their common meanings influenced the way in which the individual conceptualized that experience. Thus he did not assume that the words of the New Testament were merely expendable forms without importance in themselves.

Accordingly, Bushnell found none of the hermeneutical methods with which he was acquainted to be adequate to deal with the scriptures, since they did not take seriously the nature of the language employed. If a method of interpretation had to either leave out antagonistic forms on the

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[9]"Infinity" in this sense, referred to an open-ended system which was not bound by the limitations of a priori assumptions.

one hand or rationalize them on the other, it was not an adequate method suited to the language of scripture. He saw that his first task was to analyze the scriptures in order to understand their literary forms. He came to the conclusion that "Holy Scripture, in fact, is only a gradual unrolling or spiritualizing to us of figures and forms that envelop and represent the deeper truths of the spiritual life."[10] If one were to get to the deeper truths, Bushnell concluded, there must be a method which was adequate to make the "figures and forms" suggest their meaning. He found that the literary form of the scripture was in a large part, poetic.

> So great a part of our Bible is made up of compositions that are essentially poetic,--nearly all of it, except the parts rigidly historic or didactic, and even these have their prose largely sprinkled with poetry.[11]

To assert that scripture was poetic in its form implied that the use of objective standards or principles for interpretation were at best arbitrary if not useless. As poetic form, the scriptures had to be considered in terms of aesthetics along with music, painting, and sculpture.[12] So regarded, their final meaning and interpretation had to

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[10]Bushnell, Christ in Theology, p. 37.

[11]Bushnell, "Our Gospel, A Gift to the Imagination," pp. 263-264.

[12]The nature of the aesthetic sensibility in relation to knowledge in eighteenth century thought was discussed in Chap. iii.

be subjective and personal. Bushnell's position particularly disturbed the old-school theologians because it tended to remove the interpretation of scripture from the Church and made it simply an individual matter which, they feared, would bring Christianity to a state of anarchy. As usual, Hodge criticized Bushnell's understanding of scripture as a dangerous break with the Church's historic interpretation, not to mention an over-dependence upon individualism and mysticism.

> Dr. Bushnell forgets that there are certain doctrines so settled by the faith of the church, that they are no longer open questions. They are finally adjudged and determined. If men set aside the Bible, and choose to speak or write as philosophers, then of course the way is open to them, to teach the way they please. But for Christians, who acknowledge the Scriptures as their rule of faith, there are doctrines which they are bound to take as settled beyond all rational dispute.[13]

Bushnell did not disagree with his antagonists concerning the fact that there were doctrines "settled by the faith of the church" or that the scriptures were the "rule of faith." The point at issue he saw as the form of expression which these "doctrines" could take. Bushnell had observed the theological disputes of the Calvinists over such "indisputable" doctrines as original sin. The controversies themselves did not center around the question of whether there was a doctrine of original sin, but rather how the doctrine

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[13]Charles F. Hodge, "Review of Dr. Bushnell's Discourses in God in Christ," Biblical Repertory and Princeton Review, XXI (April, 1849), 296.

was to be understood and expressed. To Bushnell, this was a linguistic problem which he believed that, due to the limits of their theological methodology, Hodge and his orthodox contemporaries had failed to comprehend. The failure to distinguish between the doctrine and its theological expression had make it appear as though an attack upon a particular theological proposition was an attack upon the doctrine itself. Bushnell considered doctrine to be the concept or idea formed by the Church's experience of faith rather than a statement about the idea.[14] He, therefore, felt free to criticize and revise all theological statements and to enter into open discussion of them without being guilty of having denied the meaning of the doctrine itself. It is quite clear, from the following criticism of Bushnell, that Hodge did not accept that distinction between doctrine and proposition.

> The course which the church has pursued in reference to this, and similar doctrines, is to make a careful collation of all the scriptural facts relating to the subject, and then to frame a statement of those facts, which shall avoid any contradiction, either of itself and of other revealed truths. Such statement is then the church doctrine as to that subject. The doctrine does not profess to be an explanation of the facts, nor a reconciliation of them, but simply a statement of them, free from contradiction which is to be received on the authority of God.[15]

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[14]"The value of the Word rests in the impressions it is to produce in us, and not in the theories or scientific versions we are able to produce from it." Bushnell, Christ in Theology, p. 91.

[15]Hodge, "Review of God in Christ," p. 277.

At least three points of divergence between Bushnell and Hodge appeared to have their roots in the incompatible linguistic assumptions of both men. Hodge asserted that there were "scriptural facts" which were objectively perceived and "collated" by the church in a rational process of understanding. Bushnell, to the contrary, denied that scriptural language could be treated as prosaic "fact," but rather as a poetic "metaphor."[16] The process, then, by which the church moved from scriptural statements to theological statements which Hodge called "doctrine," could not for Bushnell be a deductive process from "collated facts" to frame a statement of those "facts" as a conclusion from the process. Rather, Bushnell believed the process was subjective in the same way that one grasps ideas and meanings from the experience of a work of art. There is no objectively rational or deductive process discernible between the work of art itself and the meaning of ideas which one receives from it.[17] Bushnell further denied the attempt to construct

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[16]Bushnell, Christ in Theology, p. 66.

[17]"Our Christian gospel is a gift more especially to the human imagination. It offers itself first of all and principally to the interpretive imaginings and discernings of faith, never, save in that manner, to the constructive processes of logic and speculative opinion. It is, in one sense, pictorial; in every line or lineament is traced some image or metaphor, and by no possible ingenuity can it be gotten away from metaphor; for as certainly as one metaphoric image is escaped by definition, another will be taken up, and must be, to fill its place in the definition itself." Bushnell, "Our Gospel, A Gift to the Imagination," p. 252.

what he called a "scientific theology" based upon a deductive process which linked the scriptures to doctrinal statements. He remarked, "Who would ever think of building up a science of Homer, Shakespeare, Milton? And the Bible is not a whit less poetic . . ."[18] Hodge did not make a distinction between doctrinal ideas and their propositional statements since, for him, such statements proceeded from the deductive process. If the logic of the process was valid, the conclusion had to be as true as the premises. Therefore, to attack the conclusion was to attack the premise as well. The "scriptural facts" were God's word, and valid deduction from them must "be received on the authority of God."

While Bushnell felt that he had avoided the necessity of investing human theological statements with sacred authority, the question remained as to the authority of scripture itself. The problem of how the Bible could be the word of God needed to be investigated. At the outset, Bushnell rejected the theories of verbal and plenary inspiration on historical and literary grounds.[19] There were several barriers to such infallibility in scripture. The scripture manuscripts varied in their content so that there could be no certainty as to the original wording. The canon, with

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[18] Ibid., p. 272.

[19] Bushnell, Nature and the Supernatural, p. 34.

its history of arbitrary selection at the hands of church councils, did not provide evidence that the Bible, in its present form, was infallible. Further, the orthodox understanding of sin as a "discoloration of our judgment" ought to be a warning, according to Bushnell, that human understanding of the scriptures could not be exact and precise. He recognized two difficulties in the authority of scriptural language. First, the subject matter of aesthetic and ethical experience was always difficult to express in human language. The second difficulty was to be found in the historical nature of scriptural language which it had in common with other historical sources. Historical sources did not present events, objects, or places; they gave only the meaning or interpretation of the persons viewing them.[20] Thus, such sources did not present facts but rather interpretations of what was experienced. Bushnell showed his historical awareness in the remark that "history itself, in fact, is but a kind of figure, having its greatest value, not in what it is, but what it signifies."[21] What was preserved in scripture, then, was not the literal fact or event, but what the fact or event meant or signified to the Christians of the New Testament age. That meaning was expressed in "thought forms" or symbols which were related

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[20]Bushnell, God in Christ, p. 67.

[21]Bushnell, "Our Gospel, A Gift to the Imagination," p. 264.

to the experience of those Christians. "Thought forms" were words which had become symbols, that is, their meaning could only be understood in terms of subjective experience. Such words expressed their meaning in the "upper level" rather than in the lower literal level of language structure. Thus, Bushnell could say that one gives "a thought form to the facts which are not in the facts themselves." Words such as circumcision, heart, grace, kingdom, life, liberty, and flesh all had dictionary meanings which, if applied to their use in scripture, could result only in absurd interpretations.[22] Those words were not merely general signs, Bushnell observed, but symbols which in some way participated in that which they expressed. Put another way, symbols (thought forms) were signs which because of their historical relations, came to stand for some particular understanding of an event, object, or action rather than for a general class of things.[23] An example was to be found in the word, "cross" which, besides signifying a general instrument of torture, had become modified through the experience of men in Western culture so that it represented the suffering love of God for man.

The Biblical interpreter, according to Bushnell, must have an experience similar to that which motivated the

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[22] Ibid. [23] Bushnell, God in Christ, pp. 44-46.

Biblical writers to express themselves if he is to understand their language. He further remarked that there was nothing unusual about such a requirement, since it was necessary to the understanding of all language, which itself was an expression of the common experience of people communicating on a profoundly subjective level.

> No two strangers, formed in different types of life and religion, can ever understand each other, in regard to matters of spiritual thought through the medium simply of words. There must be sympathy enough, yielded patiently enough, and for a time long enough, to bring one into the inward life and sphere of another.[24]

The experience which he described as necessary for the interpretation of scripture, Bushnell called an experience of "divinity."[25] The experience of divinity he regarded as an experience of faith in the Augustinian-Anselmian tradition. Bushnell sought to relate himself to this tradition

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[24]Bushnell, Christ in Theology, p. 47.

[25]What Bushnell described as the experience of divinity with regard to theology is similar to what the historian recognizes as the historical relativism of his sources. Wilhelm Dilthey (Einleitung in die Geisteswissenschaften, 1883) first made the distinction between scientific knowledge which comprehends phenomena by objective standards and what he called "true historical knowledge" which attempts to identify with the same inward experience which produced the documents or sources. H. Richard Niebuhr described a theology based upon historical relativism the description of which could have expressed Bushnell's viewpoint. "Such theology can attempt to state the grammar, not of universal religious language, but of a particular language, in order that those who use it may be kept in true communication with each other and with the realities to which the language refers." H. Richard Niebuhr, The Meaning of Revelation (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1962), p. 18.

when he said that, "Christian theology, then, is grounded in divinity, according to the old maxim, Fides precidit intellectum."[26] He believed that the revelatory experience of faith preceded the understanding of the scripture. Here again, one is reminded of Jonathan Edwards' concept of "divine illumination." Edwards was careful to distinguish between "inspiration" which is a kind of mystical, intuitive experience in which new truths are given and the "spiritual light":

> [It] reveals no new doctrine, it suggests no new proposition to the mind, it teaches no new thing of God, or Christ, or another word, not taught in the Bible, but only gives a due apprehension of these things that are taught in the word of God.[27]

Bushnell agreed with Edwards in that the experience of divinity did not reveal new truth. It illuminated the scriptures so that their meaning was revealed to the subjective experience. Bushnell depended upon the mediation of the scriptures for knowledge. "It [Christian theology] rests on the scripture body of fact, because, in that, the divine is bodied and expressed, and offered to experience."[28] Thus it is clear that both Bushnell and Edwards considered spiritual experience as a hermeneutical prere-

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[26]Bushnell, Christ in Theology, p. 84.

[27]Jonathan Edwards, "A Divine and Supernatural Light," Jonathan Edwards: Representative Selections, ed. by Clarence H. Faust and Thomas H. Johnson (New York: Hill and Wang, 1962), p. 105.

[28]Bushnell, Christ in Theology, p. 84.

quisite, which did not bypass the Biblical language and the human understanding. In this respect, Bushnell agreed with Coleridge that the subjective experience and the objective forms of language were understood to have a unity. But the unity which Coleridge recognized was a metaphysical unity of Reason and understanding as distinct cognitive faculties.[29] Bushnell made no such metaphysical distinction between the understanding and Reason. He regarded the experience of divinity as a subjective dimension of the understanding raised to a higher power by that experience. Thus, Bushnell's two-level theory of knowledge is distinguished from that of Coleridge and is seen to be much closer to that of Edwards and the Calvinist tradition.

Bushnell's emphasis upon the subjective immediate experience of the feelings appeared to exclude the importance of intellectual ideas as knowledge in the understanding. The conservative Calvinists who had either ignored the implications of Edwards' theory of divine illumination or had not seen Bushnell's relation to it, charged that Bushnell had denied the function of objective reason as a method of the understanding in his hermeneutical methodology. Hodge remarked that:

> The revelations of God are addressed to the whole soul,

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[29]Mildred Kitto Billings, "The Theology of Horace Bushnell Considered in Relation to That of Samuel Taylor Coleridge" (Unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, University of Chicago Divinity School, 1959), p. 81.

> to the reason, to the imagination, to the heart, and to the conscience. But unless they are true to the reason, they are as powerless as a phantasm.[30]

In answering Hodge's criticism, Bushnell sought to show how the experience of faith authenticated the meaning of the scriptures in an inner experience of the heart rather than by the logical agreement of ideas. Reason, alone, was incapable of validating Christian faith. It might be used to construct dogma as an expression of faith, but dogma was "a something thought: it is opinion offered to opinion as having a standard right; whereas the gospel is a revelation made up of fact and form and figure, and offered as a presentation to faith."[31]

In the final analysis Bushnell did not deny the role of human reason in Biblical interpretation. Rather he placed it after the experience of faith and regarded it as an aid in the expression of that faith. Thus, the scriptures did not speak directly to the unaided human reason. It seemed to Bushnell that such a position opened the door to the Unitarian-Transcendentalist view that human faculties alone, whether those abilities were called reason or intuition, could receive the truth of revelation without the redemptive experience of divinity. For Bushnell, the experience of divinity was a prerequisite to the perception of

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[30]Hodge, "Review of God in Christ," p. 269.

[31]Bushnell, "Our Gospel, A Gift to the Imagination," p. 249.

spiritual meaning in the scriptures as was the "divine light" for Edwards. Accordingly, Bushnell maintained what he felt was the intention and meaning of the Christian experience of sin, not as a condition of man's soul, but as a discoloring of every human faculty of reception and judgment.

> Indeed if it were possible to get religious truth into shapes and formulas having an absolute meaning . . . as clear even to the wicked as to the pure, and requiring no conditions of character in the receivers, it would very nearly subvert, it seems to me, all that is most significant and sublime in the discipline of life. The Scriptures, it seems to me, are most divinely wise in the fact that they attempt no such thing, but prefer to offer God in his mystery to the spiritual heart to be spiritually discerned,--discerned by love and pure docility and patient experience.[32]

The experience of divinity had its importance as a redemptive process in the character of the interpreter so that there existed a common bond between the writer of scripture and the interpreter. That experience formed the basis upon which communication could take place, but did not assure that it would. There was no mechanical relationship which could be manipulated. The interpreter should exercise patience and a "spirit waiting for the discovery of God."

At first impression, Bushnell's hermeneutical method undoubtedly places him in the tradition of Christian mysticism. However, such a categorization raises the difficulty of a definition of mysticism. That Bushnell identified a

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[32]Bushnell, Christ in Theology, p. 66.

rationally inexplicable phenomenon in the experience of faith could, perhaps, be used to place him with the mystics. But the nature of the mysterious, while he regarded it as subjective, was not a phenomenon so completely private as to defy expression. Moreover, he emphasized that the very nature of linguistic communication of the common feelings and emotional attitudes expressed this mystery. The feeling of love, for example, might express itself in objective actions, but is not itself reducible to those actions. Bushnell believed that actions themselves represented or expressed a symbolic "mystery" which was subjectively understandable without involving a direct rational process. On the basis that he accepted the proposition that there was mystery in every symbolic and poetic communication, Bushnell can be identified as a mystic. At the same time, by his emphasis upon the accommodated nature of all human knowledge, he divorced himself from the neo-Platonic tradition of mysticism, which asserted a direct and unmediated knowledge of God.[33] As noted above, Bushnell agreed with Edwards that the spiritual experience of faith (divinity) did not impart knowledge, but illuminated the understanding in order that the spiritual meaning of objective forms might be comprehended in the subjective feelings. To Bushnell, man was a finite creature bounded by time and space, limited to finite

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[33] Ibid., p. 54.

experience and relative communication. From that point of view, he strongly criticized the neo-Platonic tradition represented by Origen and Swedenborg as "extreme mystic interpreters" who employed allegory and "the three-fold meaning in the words of Scripture, and other like fancies."[34]

The practical results of Bushnell's method of linguistic interpretation may be seen in his understanding of the gospel narratives in relation to the life of Christ. While Bushnell has been criticized for not making a distinction between the "Jesus of history" and the "Christ of faith,"[35] he was well aware of the difference, but was equally aware of the difficulties associated with such a discrimination. In the latter part of the eighteenth century and through the middle of the nineteenth century, a popular reaction against the traditional dogmatic views of Jesus set in motion a series of what were intended as biographies of Jesus. In general, the historiography was objective and positivistic. Consequently, the gospels were assumed to be products of the same kind of historical scholarship.[36] Thus, it was a relatively simple task to show the

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[34] Ibid., p. 37.

[35] John W. Buckham, Progressive Religious Thought in America (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1919), p. 28.

[36] James M. Robinson, A New Quest of the Historical Jesus (London: SCM Press, Ltd., 1959), p. 35.

rational and objective plan underlying what only appeared to be miraculous. Because of Bushnell's conception of the subjective nature of New Testament language and his rejection of all objective, rationalistic interpretations of such language, it is not difficult to understand that he would be unimpressed by these works.

With the publication of Leben Jesu in 1835, David F. Strauss set forth an understanding of the gospels as mythical expressions. According to Strauss, the gospels were symbolic and mythical expressions of the eternal, perfect ideas of God-manhood which were called to life by the personality of Jesus.[37] Strauss had felt the inadequacies of both the supernaturalistic and the empirical rationalistic interpretations of the life of Jesus. He endeavored to relate the gospels to absolute ideals of humanity struggling to express themselves. While Bushnell could agree that the scriptural language was in a sense mythological, i.e., metaphoric and symbolic, he could not agree that the gospel language was the product of universal ideals.[38] For Bushnell, the symbolic and poetic expression of the New Testament was formed directly out of the particular, concrete impressions of the historical events surrounding Jesus of Nazareth. To reduce those forms to absolute ideals would violate the

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[37]Albert Schweitzer, The Quest for the Historical Jesus (London: Adam and Charles Black, 1954), p. 80.

[38]Bushnell, Nature and the Supernatural, pp. 17-18.

unique and particular subjective experience of the observers. Such an interpretation rested on the assumption that the writers of the gospels had such ideal conceptions and further, that there must be a metaphysical assumption that such ideals existed. Therefore, on the basis of his linguistic theory, Bushnell refused to reduce symbols to intellectual ideas and for that reason was very critical of Strauss' idealism.

> The works of Strauss, Henell, Newman, Froude, Fox, Parker, all more or less distinguished for their ability, as for their virtual annihilation of the gospels, are together rested on this basis . . . the assault upon Christianity, in which they agree, is the one from which the greatest harm is now to be expected, and that, in great part, for the reason that they do not acknowledge the true genealogy of their doctrine, and that, hovering over the gulf that separates atheism from Christianity, they take away faith from one, without exposing the baldness and forbidding sterility of the other.[39]

Bushnell believed that all of these men in their work had performed an illegitimate reduction of New Testament language which he felt would bring about the annihilation of the gospels. For example, Strauss and Theodore Parker had reduced the symbols to ideas, while George Fox, the founder of the Society of Friends, had bypassed the language for the direct mystical knowledge of the "inner voice of God speaking to the soul." All of these interpretations rested upon metaphysical assumptions which Bushnell saw no reason to accept. The gospels were to be regarded as formulations of

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[39] Ibid., pp. 22-23.

human experience. They reflected the world of that experience. That was the real world, according to Bushnell, rather than the world of abstract intellect and a priori judgments.

Since Bushnell had rejected the interpretations of the gospels with which he was familiar, he felt the responsibility to show how he understood the "metaphor" (myth) of scripture.

> Let us not be misunderstood. We do not assume the truth of the narrative by which the manner and facts of the life of Jesus are reported to us; for this, by the supposition, is a matter in question. We only assume the representations themselves, as being just what they are, and discover the necessary truth in the transcendent, wondrously self-evident picture of divine excellence and beauty presented in them.[40]

What Bushnell described in the quote above was the Christ of faith which he found in the "representations" or symbols which portrayed the impact of Jesus of Nazareth on the New Testament community. He did not accept an interpretation which regarded the scriptures as human biography. The poetic images sought to express Jesus not as he might have appeared to a spectator, but rather as the God-Man whose life and acts had transformed the observer's world. Bushnell conceived of the gospels as confessions of faith which intended to express and generate that same experience of Jesus in others which had been felt by the earliest community. The question which the gospels sought to answer was:

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[40] Ibid., p. 277.

Who is this Jesus Christ? Bushnell was not concerned with the human life of Jesus because he did not think that the gospels presented him that way.

> The most conspicuous matter therefore, in the history of Jesus, is that what holds true, in all our experience of men, is inverted in Him. He grows sacred, peculiar, wonderful, divine, as acquaintance reveals Him. At first He is only a man, as the senses report Him to be; knowledge, observation, familiarity, raise Him into the God-man. He grows pure and perfect, more than mortal in wisdom, a being enveloped in sacred history, a friend to be loved in awe--dies into awe in a sorrow that contains the element of worship![41]

It should be evident from the foregoing discussion that the question of the "Jesus of history" was irrelevant to Bushnell. He did not assume that such a life of a man was either intended or could be obtained from the gospels. Instead, his investigation of the gospels convinced him that they portrayed a reversal of the common experience of human existence when they spoke of Jesus Christ. They presented the "Christ of faith." That was their intent. Thus, Bushnell was able to accept the fact that there were no adequate sources for a biography of Jesus. He recognized the nature of the gospel language and its intent long before the historical-critical evidence had been conclusively set forth.[42]

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[41] Ibid., p. 321.

[42] Bushnell's view of language gave him an historical insight about the New Testament which was not generally accepted until the twentieth century. "The basic reorientation consisted in the discovery that the Gospels are the devotional literature of the primitive Church rather than

In summary, it is clear that Bushnell's understanding of scripture was directly determined by his linguistic theory. He was true to his linguistic epistemology in rejecting metaphysical assumptions as the basis of his hermeneutical methods. Because he held a two-level theory of language, he was able to recognize that the language of scripture was poetic and therefore required subjective and aesthetic principles of interpretation. Thus, Bushnell refused to permit objective standards for the interpretation of scripture. In addition, his linguistic investigation enabled him to perceive that historical sources such as the scriptures were expressions of the subjective experience of human beings rather than re-creations of objective events. On this basis, Bushnell was able to achieve a solution to the problem of the "Jesus of history" not unlike that position held by many twentieth-century scholars.[43] Perhaps Bushnell's most important contribution to hermeneutics was his concept of the experience of divinity. Inspired by Edwards' idea of "divine illumination" which was in the primacy of faith tradition of Augustine and Anselm, Bushnell

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products of scholarship." Robinson, The New Quest of the Historical Jesus, p. 35.

[43]Bushnell's concept that the gospels are expressions of the subjective experience of the faith of the New Testament writers is similar to the understanding of the gospels as "kerygma," i.e., the preaching of the primitive church. For a discussion of the relationship of the "kerygma" to the Jesus of history problem, see Robinson, A New Quest for the Historical Jesus, pp. 38-47.

developed through his linguistic theory, a basis for scriptural authority which avoided both extremes of rationalism and mysticism.

CHAPTER V

LANGUAGE IN THEOLOGY

Horace Bushnell's study of theological language led him to formulate two general principles. The first held that propositions were not exact representations of reality; the second pointed out that since theological terms had to be defined abstractly if they were to communicate in the concrete, they had to have particular meaning related to the experience or impression they were intended to convey.

With respect to his first principle, Bushnell argued that theological propositions could not be understood as photographs or models mechanically corresponding to reality. It made no difference whether that reality was defined as ultimate or experiential. For a statement or proposition to be a picture or a model of an actual situation, it would be necessary to use words in that statement which had specific, referrable (objective) meanings. Such a requirement, however, ruled out the possibility of using words such as soul, love, God, etc., because they lacked specific, objectively perceivable definitions. Those words, i.e., soul, love, God, etc., did not correspond to or represent specific

things. Rather they were expressions or symbols representing subjective experience which, when it was defined, became abstract.

Bushnell's second principle of theological language was corollary to his first. Clearly, if one were to formulate a theological language, words would have to be defined and, in so doing, be rendered as abstractions. However, if they were to communicate in the realm of concrete, personal religious experience, they had to have particular meanings related to the experience itself. Thus, the word "love" remained an abstraction until it was used by a human being to express a particular relationship or experience. The meaning of the word was the experience for the individual involved. At the same time it continued to be an abstraction for those beyond the experience.

Bushnell considered the use of words to be an experiment or construct very similar to a work of art. Art attempted to clothe symbols with meaning in the context of a life situation. In a different context, the work of art acquired a different meaning. So it was with language. Bushnell maintained that changing the cultural background or life situation in which words were used had the effect of changing their meaning. Because men had been using words as though their meanings were universal and had little or no dependence upon their cultural context, Bushnell thought they had created nearly insurmountable difficulties for

theology and philosophy. Those disciplines had become systems of abstractions due to their dependence upon universal definitions which themselves were abstractions. By isolating words from the life experience which supplied their meanings, philosophy and theology had in effect isolated themselves from human cultural experience. They had become irrelevant, if not incomprehensible in terms of human experience. Bushnell was critical of both disciplines (theology and philosophy) because, through false assumptions concerning language, he believed they had led men to see themselves and their lives in the framework of logically consistent abstractions which denied their own experience.

In elaborating his theology, Bushnell sought to avoid the use of universal abstractions "which are commonly called definitions . . ." To that end he made his linguistic principles the foundation of his methodology. However, he discovered at the outset that once he had abandoned universal abstractions as definitions for words, he was confronted with the twin problems of consistency and authority. As long as one deduced terms from metaphysical assumptions, e.g., in the tradition of scholastic theology, it was relatively easy to establish both consistency and authority in theology. But, Bushnell's linguistic principles had undermined the possibility of an epistemology derived from metaphysical premises. Thus, he was forced to seek a different

solution to the problems of consistency and authority.[1]

Bushnell was not overly concerned with the question of consistency. It was impossible for him to construct a closed theological system because of his linguistic principle that use in a particular historico-cultural context determined meaning.[2] Indeed, his method of paradox implicitly suggested that meaning or truth could be recognized in the inconsistency of apparent contradiction. Bushnell's friend, Austin Phelps of the Andover School of Theology summed up the matter with his remark: "The last and least that concerned him [Bushnell] was the consistency of his present with his past positions, or of either with the revelation of tomorrow."[3]

On the question of authority in theology, Bushnell offered a more comprehensive analysis. He found the authority and basis for Christian theology in the revelatory experience of God's love in Jesus Christ. The experience of revelation he believed to be the common denominator in the history of the church's theological thought. The task of theology, then, was to express the subjective experience of revelation through the language of the particular historic era in which the theologian lived. Only in that manner

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[1]Bushnell, Christ in Theology, p. 45.

[2]Cheney, Life and Letters, p. 532.

[3]Ibid.

could his work be addressed to his contemporaries rather than to posterity.[4] Bushnell himself was concerned with the contemporary nature of linguistic meaning and accordingly set out to develop his theology from the expressions of human experience which he discovered around him and within him. The result of his approach became evident after the furor raised by God in Christ. In his defense he undertook to relate his theology to the historic thought of the church. He was surprised to find how close he was to the Reformers and the creeds of the ancient church.[5] Even as systematic a thinker as John Calvin had betrayed a similar attitude toward the necessity of divine experience acting as a judge upon theology when he (Calvin) wrote:[6]

> For we cannot, properly speaking, say that God is known where there is no religion or piety. . . . By piety, I mean that union of reverence and love of God which a knowledge of his benefits causes.[7]

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[4]Bushnell, Christ in Theology, p. 45.

[5]Ibid., p. 12.

[6]For a discussion of the subjective aspects of Calvin's theological method, see: Edward A. Dowey, The Knowledge of God in Calvin's Theology (New York: Columbia University Press, 1952), pp. 24-31.

[7]John Calvin, Institutes of the Christian Religion, I, ii, 1. Calvin's statement "the knowledge of his benefits" should be understood in the perspective of his definition of knowledge which is quite similar to Bushnell's in this case. For Calvin as well as Bushnell, an inner experience of the Holy Spirit was a necessary prerequisite to true knowledge. Calvin called his concept "illumination" and it was not unlike what Jonathan Edwards called "Divine illumination." Dowey, op. cit., p. 173, pointed out in connection with Calvin's concept that: ". . . a special activity of

Bushnell approached his theology from the conviction that it should be more than a mere exposition of what had been said before him. Otherwise, he felt that such a work would lack the spontaneity of the present and particular perception of Christian revelation. Since the language of theology had meaning only in the context within which it was expressed, the further removed it was from that historical context, the more abstract the words necessarily became. Bushnell believed that it was essential to establish the authority of Christian faith in terms of a personal apprehension. Thus, to do so one had to experience one's faith in the context of his own special situation before he could be able to point out his agreement or disagreement with "authorities." It was for that reason he studiously avoided reference to recognized historical authorities in God in Christ. Instead, he "forged his way ahead with little dependence upon others."[8] That Bushnell's theology was based upon authority in contemporary Christian experience rather than abstract definition is substantiated by two of

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the Holy Spirit is necessary to enable the sin-darkened mind of man to comprehend what God clearly sets before him." Thus, for Calvin, consistency was not a system of intellectual agreement of ideas, but rested upon the subjective authority of the inner "illumination." John Leith, "Calvin's Theological Method and the Ambiguity in His Theology," Reformation Studies, Franklin H. Littell, ed. (Richmond, Va.: John Knox Press, 1962), p. 108, remarked that: "Calvin was ready to sacrifice logical consistency in order to do justice to the complexity of Christian revelation."

[8]John W. Buckham, Progressive Religious Thought in America (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1919), p. 8.

his colleagues. Amos Chesebrough, an intimate friend and defender of Bushnell, remarked that "it is worthy of note that the principle of testing the truth and value of doctrine by its practical relations to life is fundamental to Bushnell's entire system of religious thought."[9] Noah Porter summed up his view of the matter in the following manner:

> He [Bushnell] never separates these principles [of theology] from their direct and practical application to the feelings and the life. In his hands, they are never dead dogmas or lifeless abstractions, with only a speculative interest for logical refiners, but they are always living truths, which require and evoke a warm response from every soul.[10]

Bushnell's theological statements expressed ideas appropriate to his presupposition that theological thought had to be grounded in the contemporary experience of the Christian. It was the consistency with which he developed his position from his premises which undoubtedly accounted for the contrast between his theology and that of his contemporaries, e.g., the Unitarians and the orthodox Calvinists. A theology which rested upon rational deduction from abstraction (a priori) principles necessarily terminated in

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[9]Amos Chesebrough, "Reminiscences of the Bushnell Controversy," The Minutes of the 193rd Annual Meeting of the General Association of Connecticut (Hartford: Hartford Press, Case, Lockwood and Brainerd, 1902), p. 48.

[10]Noah Porter, "Review of Dr. Bushnell on The Vicarious Sacrifice," The New Englander, XCV (April, 1866), 231.

propositional statements. Bushnell's theology, by way of contrast, because it was grounded in human experience, led to a pluralism of linguistic expression which could not have been reduced to propositional statements.

> There is no so disingenuous and untrustworthy soul, none so irreverent to truth, or incapable of truth, as one who is rigidly confined to the little credo or thimble measure of his own formula. What he calls consistency, means the same as a small sense of truth; for if he had a larger sense of truth, such as a full Christian experience ought to give him, he would even want several thimbles to contain it.[11]

Bushnell's linguistic pluralism, however, threatened to plunge him into a new difficulty. The dualism of his linguistic expression derived from individual human experience might easily have led him into the snare of chaotic subjectivism as advocated and practiced by the "left-wing" spiritualists of the Reformation.[12] Aware of the danger, Bushnell steered away from it. To overcome the problem of subjectivism he had recourse to his principle of "comprehensiveness" which enabled him to "adjust theologic differences." With "comprehensiveness," Bushnell was able to establish a relationship between the objective and the subjective which took both into account.

In developing "comprehensiveness" as a means of "adjusting theologic differences" Bushnell did not intend to

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[11]Bushnell, Christ in Theology, p. 54.

[12]The term "left-wing" is used to describe the extreme mysticism of the period characterized by Thomas Muntzer and the Zwickau Prophets.

imply that he was seeking a middle position or a compromise to keep peace between warring factions. "It [comprehensiveness] is in fact a disciple of extremes, taking lessons of both, and ceasing not until it has gotten whatever good and whatever truth made their opinions sacred to themselves."[13] He displayed a reverence and respect for the thought forms and expressions of human beings whom he believed were seeking the root of "truth." "Truth" in that sense was not a statement about ultimate reality, but about the area of common subjective experience of Christian faith. Bushnell felt that if those areas of commonality could be explored and appreciated regardless of their linguistic expression, the practical result would be a clarification of the nature of Christianity. At the same time such an appreciation could provide a more effective basis for communication and understanding.

> In the comprehensive school it will be a first conviction that all serious, earnest men have something in their view which makes it truth to them; therefore: that all serious, earnest men have a repugnance in their words, have yet some radical agreement, and if the place can be found, will somewhere reveal their brotherhood. Therefore they are not only to tolerate, but to love and respect each other. Nay, they are each to ask, what has the other which is necessary to its own completeness in the truth.[14]

There was a parallel between Bushnell and Luther

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[13]Horace Bushnell, "Christian Comprehensiveness," Building Eras in Religion (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1903), p. 401.

[14]Ibid., p. 402.

with respect to their avoidance of complete subjectivism. Both essentially agreed that the authority of the subjective experience of Christian faith was the final judge of theology.[15] Such a position in effect reversed the method of scholastic orthodoxy which made propositional statements of dogma the norms of faith.[16] Thus, scholasticism had made the creeds the norms of faith from which theological propositions could be deduced. Bushnell and Luther, on the contrary, regarded the creeds as expressions of Christian faith rather than the normative beginning for faith. Both held that each Christian should accept doctrine only because it constituted an expression of his own experience and individual history. In that respect, Bushnell saw himself as related through his methodology to Luther's concept of justification by faith. " . . . The precise operative principle of it, which made it true to him, is no other than the doctrine I have stated; however, different at first view it may appear."[17] Bushnell further concluded that Luther too had recognized the pluralism of the linguistic expression of Christian experience. "There are many sayings in the

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[15]Philip S. Watson, Let God be God (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1947), p. 173.

[16]Arlo Dean Duba, "The Principles of Theological Language in the Writings of Horace Bushnell and Paul Tillich" (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Princeton Theological Seminary, 1960), p. 149.

[17]Bushnell, Christ in Theology, p. 307.

Scriptures which, if taken literally, are contradictory, but if the causes are shown, everything is right."[18] It was the "causes" of contradictions in human expression which Bushnell sought to understand through his method of comprehensiveness.

Bushnell believed that contradictions arose from at least four main factors. The first concerned the presuppositions or categories which one employed in the investigation of the nature of the "material." Thus, matter might be viewed as an ideal or an empirical category and the different viewpoints will be reflected in contradiction. Second, contradiction resulted from the finitude of human perception and comprehension of a subject. Personal or cultural factors could create a bias in expression which, by emphasizing one aspect of a subject, might lead to the contradiction of the expression of that subject as seen from another biased point of view. Finally, and perhaps the most important source of contradiction was to be found in language itself. Since words could only express one facet of subjective truth in a single statement, Bushnell concluded that it was necessary to multiply such "figurative" statements if one were to comprehend the subjective experience. Thus, the single statement was deceptive because it appeared to offer "truth" while, for Bushnell, truth was broader and more profound in

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[18]Martin Luther, Works, H. E. Jacobs, ed. (Philadelphia: Homan Press, 1915-1932), V, 174-175.

the inner experience than any single objective statement could express.[19]

From the foregoing discussion of Bushnell's ideas concerning the limitation of language in the expression of truth as well as its relation to subjective experience, it should be evident that his theology always remained open to reassessment. His conception of language was responsible for the structure of his theological methods of expression.

> Dogma has been always going to be, or just about to be settled, by some new school or teacher, yet in fact never is. If we could possibly think out a gospel, we could not frame it and phrase it in language, so as to make a finality of what we think. For we have no language for opinions in moral and religious matters that is not compounded in forms and figures, which are only images, and not exact notations for what they represent. They are good for the uses of faith and, in fact, more wondrously significant and sufficient in that manner, that they have no such determinant property as permits them to serve the uses of dogma.[20]

Bushnell rejected the belief that dogma, creeds, and catechisms possessed the authority commonly attributed to them. "They only give us the seeing of the authors, at the precise standpoint occupied by them, at the time, and they are true only as seen from that standpoint,--not even there, save in approximate sense."[21] Bushnell was referring to his understanding of the relativity of historical sources in the fact that such sources were interpretations made by particular

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[19]Bushnell, Christ in Theology, p. 84.

[20]Bushnell, Building Eras in Religion, p. 251.

[21]Bushnell, God in Christ, p. 80.

persons at particular times. He went on to point out that dependence upon the language of the creeds to communicate the understanding or truth originally intended by their authors encountered another difficulty. Words always have

> a latent element of figure, which, probably the authors know not of, but without which, it is neither true to them, nor to anybody. But in a long course of repetition, the figure dies out, and the formula settles into literality, and then, if the repetition goes on, it is really an assent to what is not true; for what was true, at the beginning, has now become untrue--and that, however, paradoxical it may seem, by being assented to.[22]

Thus, Bushnell applied to the creeds an understanding of the phenomena he had discovered, i.e., words lost their particular, "figurative" meaning and became "literal" abstractions when separated from the particular historical experience which gave them their original meaning.

Bushnell did not reject creeds out of hand. On the contrary, he had no sympathy for the New England Unitarians who protested against them. What Bushnell did believe was that the task of the theologian was to go behind the creed "to the men who made it, taking their standpoint, and abating what belongs to the form of a truth, in distinction from the truth itself."[23] Here again he expressed the idea of comprehensiveness. It was always necessary to appreciate and perceive the "truth" of a statement from the standpoint of the context in which it originated. Only then could one hope to discover in what way it was "truth" for those who

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[22] Ibid., p. 80-81.

[23] Ibid., p. 82.

formulated it. Bushnell found that he could accept a great many creeds when he recognized them as forms of the pluralistic expression of Christian experience.[24]

In the final analysis, it is apparent that Bushnell felt much of the same difficulty with the language of the creeds as he had with that of scripture. In the interpretation of creedal language the tendency had been to accept the words as if they were pictures of objectively existing things rather than expressions of subjective experience. He also felt that attention had not been paid to the historical relativity of the understandings expressed in the creeds. Those who wrote the creeds were removed from the scriptures in time, and cultural experience in the same way that the modern interpreter is removed from both scriptures and creeds. Therefore, Bushnell concluded that the creeds could not exercise formal and absolute authority because as theological statements they were as subject to the relative factors of history and language as were the statements of modern interpreters. Thus, he did not appeal to the church fathers for his theological authority, but rather to what he could discern by his method of comprehensiveness. He sought a common subjective experience of Christian faith in the scriptures, in himself, and in his contemporaries. For Bushnell, consistency did not reside in the agreement of

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[24] Ibid.

words, but in the way in which words express a common understanding of the subjective experience of faith. Thus, in the light of his linguistic principles in relation to the construction of theology it should not be surprising to find him say that "It may be necessary to change the forms (of creed and dogma), to hold us in the same truths."[25]

Bushnell enumerated five functions which he thought theology should perform in the life of Christian institutions. In the analysis of those functions it is possible to see how his principles of language determined his ideas concerning the practical applications of theology. The first use of theology was to provide a bridge between the life of unregenerate man and the life of the Christian. Second, he believed that the human mind needed a rational systematization of thought. In addition, Bushnell could see a value in theological statements to bring about productive conversations with philosophy in which both would be reminded of the limits of their epistemology. In that manner, he could see how such conversations with science would be beneficial. Finally, Bushnell proposed the usefulness of theology in correcting extreme subjectivism.

Bushnell remarked, "The world is not in the spirit, but in the life of nature. There it must be met, and somewhat on its own level."[26] The theological task of bridging

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[25] Ibid., p. 80.

[26] Ibid., p. 310.

the chasm which separated the life of Christian faith from that of natural man presented a complexity because of its involvement with the problem of sin and grace. It should be clearly understood that, from Bushnell's point of view, there could be no mechanical process that could lead man to salvation. With respect to salvation, theology could only provide an occasion or agency for the grace of God to work its redemption. In this respect, theology functioned like a work of art. A work of art was not constructed to lead step by step to a rational appreciation and understanding of its content. A work of art addressed itself to man as a whole being in the sense that although it might appeal to the intellect, it affected the deeper feelings and emotions. Its meaning could only be comprehended in the context of that particular individual's self-understanding. In order to do this, Bushnell maintained that the work of art might present itself to the viewer with some recognizable or familiar form, line, color, or symbol with which the person could in some way identify. Just as a work of art began with some note of familiarity to stimulate an impression, so too, theology "will have some connection with the age, and will set forth Christ, in a scheme of thought that has some reference to the present habit and want."[27] The danger for theology, as it was for art, was that the point of famili-

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[27] Ibid., p. 311.

arity might be such a stereotyped image that it would prove difficult for the individual to shake loose from the conditioned image and by so doing, be ready to go on to new "connections" and thought. It should be remarked that for Bushnell, the process of the communication of new impressions was not mechanical nor did it necessarily bring about an experience of faith. A theological construction could only supply a context in which the grace of God might operate so as to bring about an experience of faith.

The catechetical instruction of children can serve as an illustration of Bushnell's use of theology as a bridge between the life of the natural man and the Christian. Instruction was not to be used merely as a formal exercise of memory in order to make the child learn the system of doctrine. "The soul of the child will not be fastened to Christ by spikes of dogma driven by parental authority."[28] The "truth" of theology had to be apprehended in the subjective experience of the person to whom the doctrine was taught. It should not be presented as an eternal truth to which one should assent.

> The eternal idea of justice makes no one just; that of truth makes no one true; that of beauty makes no soul beautiful. So the eternal law of right makes no one righteous. All these standard ideas require a process or drill, into the field of experience, in order to become mature into characters, or to fashion character

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[28] Ibid., p. 310.

into the molds they supply.[29]

Here once again was the protest against linguistic abstraction which Bushnell insisted had no relation to the life to which it was addressed. Catechetical instruction became for him, the working out of the possibilities for the representation of the subjective experience that lay behind the doctrine. The doctrine could only stimulate the "process or drill into the field of experience." The "field of experience" was, by analogy, that point of familiarity or identity which the work of art possessed in order to stimulate new impressions and ideas in the mind of the observer. For theology, the "field of experience" was the contingent ground through which the grace of God might lead to a transformation of the person's self-understanding.

In his second use of theology, Bushnell moved in a direction quite opposite to the wholistic experience of the first. Where his first principle required the realization of the subjective meaning of terms, his second function of theology contained a recognition that man's mind seems to demand a logical systematization of thought. "Our mind adheres to unity, demanding that all events and opinions shall conform to system and support, as a whole, what we

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[29]Bushnell, Nature and the Supernatural, p. 118.

call the unity of reason."[30] There seemed to be a kind of "instinct of system" in human nature which was useful as a discipline to sharpen the expression of experience. In one sense, that position was an acknowledgement that theology was useful but not authoritative. The place of reason in theology was to bring men into closer agreement, not to establish a norm for thought. Logic, however, should not be permitted to serve the purposes of reductionism in the language of Christian experience.

> Accordingly it will always be seen, that one who leads in a dogmatic, or closely defined exposition of some doctrine, is gathering his mind, as it were, into a precinct within itself, and that, while he is putting everything, as he conceives, into the solid, scientific form, he is all the while giving indications, in the manner and matter of his argument, of an immense outside wealth of sentiment and perception, no wise reducible under the scheme of his dogma.[31]

In appreciating why Bushnell found value in the use of system and reason in theology, three main points should be considered. First, there was the need for rational exercise and discipline which would bring objective statements into a harmonious relationship for intellectual understanding. Second, because of this discipline and order, one

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[30]Bushnell, God in Christ, p. 312. Bushnell's statement should not be taken to mean that he conceived of an a priori category of rational unity, but that this phenomenon was exhibited as a desire of experience. It was this desire which stimulated his theory of comprehensiveness.

[31]Horace Bushnell, The Vicarious Sacrifice (New York: Charles Scribner and Company, 1866), p. 24.

might succeed in bringing other persons into a more general agreement with respect to the representation and expression of faith. Finally, Bushnell regarded the rational process in theology as a useful exercise which, although it was largely a manipulation of language and could not provide access to truth, served to provide a satisfaction of the "instinct of system" demanded by the human being. If the process should be conceived as a serious effort to deal with reality, it defeated its purpose. Bushnell's principle that theological words derived their meaning from their particular use in the context of subjective experience precluded an abstract analytic approach to their meaning. By definition, then, Bushnell thought that all deductive processes were limited in their application to abstractions and accordingly could not deal with particular reality. Logical consistency in language, while it had its uses, was deceptive as an instrument to discover truth and had little if any relation to the reality of experience.[32]

Bushnell intended his first two practical uses of theology to satisfy what he perceived to be the needs of human nature. The third and fourth applications of theology were aimed respectively at the disciplines of philosophy and science. He acknowledged a value in systematic theology in that it could fortify itself against the objections of

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[32]Bushnell, Building Eras in Religion, p. 280.

philosophical skeptics and various other critics of Christianity. That value was not however, in refutation or in proving a point so that faith might be established by argument. Systematic theology was useful as a tool to produce the impression that

> Christianity has something to say. . . . Were it not for this, had it nothing to speak of but experiences and spiritualities, it would be disrespected by the uninitiated, as a scheme that begins and ends in unintelligible vagaries.[33]

Therefore, theology could use a rational system to demonstrate its understanding of man and the world, but not as a substitute for faith. It should be emphasized at this point, that Bushnell did not jettison his epistemological and linguistic principles in order to carry on a dialogue with philosophy. His main concern was to lay down the epistemological ground rules which he believed that both philosophy and theology must observe. Inasmuch as words such as "good," "true," and "beautiful" all represented abstractions until related to a specific historical-personal context, philosophy no less than theology was captive to the problem of linguistics. If both disciplines recognized the nature of the language which they each must use, Bushnell believed that the differences in methodology between the two fields would cease to be antagonistic and contradictory.

> In what we call our definitions, whether in theology or moral philosophy, we only put one set of metaphors in

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[33]Bushnell, God in Christ, p. 313.

> place of another, and if we understand ourselves, there may be a certain use in doing it, even as there is in shifting our weight on the other leg; perhaps we make ourselves more intelligible by doing it.[34]

Quite clearly, Bushnell's strictures aimed at the philosophers were much the same as the arguments he directed against the theologians. It was necessary for those in both disciplines to understand that as long as their arguments were expressed in rational forms employing words expressing objective or definitional content, they amounted to little more than linguistic manipulation. Now, such linguistic arguments were not of necessity a serious danger. Indeed, if properly understood, they might at least lead to the Socratic conclusion that one does not have precise knowledge of things. Further, Bushnell conceded that logical argumentation could produce some beneficial results in that it might disclose additional errors and fallacies. Thus, in the rational analysis of such concepts as determinism or the nature of perception, one might be able to eliminate conclusions which were superficial and naive. The consequence would be a desirable improvement of the sharpness and precision in expression of the common problems which exist for both philosophy and theology. Perhaps it might not be too optimistic to hope that such an improvement in the clarity of expression might lead men to recognize that solutions depend upon giving up stereotyped methods of thought.

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[34]Bushnell, Building Eras in Religion, p. 273.

Bushnell perceived a sharper linguistic distinction in the relationship of theology to science. He was aware that the epistemology of science should operate as a chastening force upon speculation in theology.

> We have still immense masses of theologic rubbish on hand, which belong to the Ptolemaic system, huge piles of assumptions about angels that have never sinned and angels that have, and other worlds and the reach of Christ's atonement there, which were raised up, evidently, on the world, when it was flat, and must ultimately disappear, as we come into a more true sense of the astronomic universe.[35]

With its empirical methodology, science could provide theology with an objective standard which could be a useful tool in hacking away the historical accumulations which were not properly a part of the discipline of theology. The epistemological requirements of science demanded that all objective statements be based on and supported by objectively verifiable evidence. The scientific method forced theology to reexamine its epistemological method.[36] With the sug-

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[35]Bushnell, God in Christ, p. 314.

[36]An illustration of Bushnell's point can be seen in the way in which the statements of the creeds are understood. The assertion that "Jesus Christ is God" appears in its linguistic form as a statement of objective reality and has been historically understood as such by both medieval and protestant scholasticism. But when the epistemological criterion of objectively verifiable evidence is applied to this statement, it becomes immediately apparent that it cannot stand. One is forced to recognize that no matter how it appears in its linguistic form, it is a statement of faith born out of the Christian community. When isolated from its historical context as a confession of faith, the statement became an abstraction which produced a false understanding because of its form. The proper form should be preceded by the words, "I believe" (credo). Only then can it be understood in its proper context and taken out of the arena of objective statements about reality.

gestion that theology and science enter into a conversation, Bushnell sought to hasten the dissolution of scholastic orthodoxy in New England in the same way in which William of Occam had undermined scholastic methodology as it was represented in the medieval synthesis between revelation and reason. Both Bushnell and Occam offered essentially the same objection to abstractions by pointing out their unreality in relation to particular concrete perception. Occam declared that abstractions were only words (voces). Bushnell, however, was less extreme and adopted a position akin to moderate realism in that he held that abstractions or generalities had some reality in their analogical relation to particular experience.

> If, on the other hand, what power of reason or science he [a man] had is wholly disallowed and renounced, so as to operate a check no longer on the contemplations of faith, or assist in framing into order the announcements of feeling, then faith and feeling are becoming a land of dreams, and the man who began as a Christian ends a mystic. Faith must learn to be the light of nature, nature to apply her cautions and restraining judgments. The heart and the head must be as two that walk together, never so truly agreed as when they agree to help each other.[37]

While Bushnell perceived a value in the corrective influence of the scientific methodology upon a theology which had gotten out of hand, he recognized that science should be aware of its own epistemological limitations. The same corrective influence should be brought to bear when a

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[37]Bushnell, God in Christ, p. 316.

false science, in its enthusiasm, erroneously declared that reality was knowable only to those initiated into the mysteries of its methodology.[38] Bushnell believed that both science and theology had much to teach each other and both might benefit where the result would be less confusion and more understanding.

The last use for which Bushnell thought theology was important was perhaps its most ancient task. Theology, he believed, should function within the Christian community to bring about a better understanding of the experiences of individual Christians. Bushnell was neither so removed from Calvinistic doctrine nor so optimistic as to assume that man was by nature good. He pointed out that men were

> liable to the instigation of passion, to be overheated in the flesh and think it is the inspiration of God. Christian theology and speculative activity are needed as providing checks and balances.[39]

Thus, Bushnell sought a method which might serve to check the flights of fancy and erratic tendencies of the sinful human intellect. According to Bushnell, as Christians struggle to express their understanding of Christian

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[38]When a scientist for example, asserts that God, love, truth, and beauty are merely psychological relativities, he should be reminded that his own objective statements are not objectively verifiable according to the requirements of the scientific method. It might be further pointed out to him that the evidence of human experience with which theology deals, is not nearly as easily verified as that which constitutes the data of empirical science.

[39]Bushnell, God in Christ, p. 315.

experience, they "check and balance" each other so that the commonality of the Christian experience emerges and the church is saved from heresy. In that way, the psychological objectivity of theology was protected by the community of experience. In the final application of theology, we find again the tension between the subjective and the objective which Bushnell maintained was necessary to theology if it were to avoid the twin dangers of scholasticism and mysticism.

Bushnell believed that there were two reasons why a theology which attempted to deal with the ultimate nature of things became irrelevant to the human community. First, there was no language which could express such ultimacy if it should exist. Second, man as a finite creature bounded by space and time was limited to the particular experience which was relative to the framework or context of his particular existence. Finally, according to Bushnell's theory of language, ultimacy itself was merely a concept or abstraction which resulted from generalization from particular experience. The ultimate was never in itself a part of that experience. Once he had dismissed the possibility of a theology which could explain the ultimate nature of things, Bushnell attempted to provide a theological methodology which could operate independently of ideal metaphysical assumptions. According to his principles of language, a legitimate epistemology had to proceed from the particular

experience of human beings as that experience was expressed in the context of their cultural relations. How man experienced his world and felt about himself was, after all, his "reality" or "truth." Moreover, man expressed his experience of his situation or condition in the words available to him. Bushnell, however, recognized a wider meaning of "truth," one which went beyond the individual or personal situation in the community of men. Since man did not live in isolation, his personal psychological state was not the sole criteria of reality. Every individual's context broadened through his relations with other men. Bushnell concluded that it was this communal relation which operated as a corrective force upon the wholly subjective personal experience of the individual. Bushnell described this communal, corrective force in his principle of comprehensiveness.

Thus, it has been shown how Bushnell's concepts of language in relation to human experience shaped his methodological principles in constructing his theology. In the next chapters, the discussion will be centered on the way in which Bushnell used these same concepts of language to demonstrate a ground for theology through analyzing human expression and institutions as symbols of experience.

PART III

GROUNDING OF THEOLOGY:

CULTURAL LANGUAGE AS EXPRESSIVE OF HUMAN EXPERIENCE

CHAPTER VI

SIN IN HUMAN EXPRESSION

This study of Bushnell's thought has been concerned primarily with the assumptions from which his theological system was elaborated. Thus, we have been concerned with establishing Bushnell's linguistic presuppositions and relating them to his epistemology in order to demonstrate his steadfast conviction that his epistemology was primary to his metaphysics and that he refused to posit any metaphysical propositions which could not be derived from and supported by his epistemology. In this chapter and those following, the results of the application of his basic principles to the main theological questions of Christianity will be traced. His theological solutions will be examined in the terms which he presented them, i.e., in forms relevant to the experience of man. At the outset it should be pointed out that since this examination is concerned only with the exposition of Bushnell's theology, there will be no consideration of the "adequacy," "maturity," or correctness of his theological doctrines.

Bushnell was not free from assumptions about the

ultimate nature of reality in terms of his personal, psychological orientation. He recognized however, that these assumptions could not be directly supported by his epistemology and were therefore, not to be made the basis of his methodology. Theology should operate on the level of man's experience of his world and himself as it was expressed in language if it was to be relevant to the human situation. Thus, one can see the logic of Bushnell's investigation of the nature of sin. He began by avoiding a definition of sin because such a definition before the investigation would necessarily be the result of deduction from some a priori assumptions. While he acknowledged that there was a word "sin" used by men, the question was to discover what it meant to them. "Undoubtedly sin, as a fact of human consciousness, is the necessary subject of the knowledge of sin."[1] Thus, if one wanted to know about sin, he should not consult a dictionary, but rather he should try to understand how people have expressed a sense of sin. Formal definitions were misleading since they were abstractions. Description and illustration may be all that one could know about sin, since they deal with the particular experience of sin. He approached his investigation by giving examples of the experience of blame and guilt which appeared in the daily life of human relationships, in society and business.

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[1]Bushnell, Nature and the Supernatural, p. 133.

> Thus, if there be two partners in trade, and one of them absconds with all the profits and funds of the establishment, leaving the other, with his family, victims to the common liabilities, and to a necessary doom, for life, of poverty; but what art can either he or they, ever manage to eradicate their sense of wrong, or the blame they impute to the perfidious man whose crime has been the despoiler of their life? They may forgive him, they may follow him with their prayers to the hours of his last breath, but they will pray as for a guilty man, whose crime is the bitterness of his life, and has been the burden of theirs. Suppose now they turn philosophers and make the discovery that there is no sin, that all actions take place under the necessary law of cause and effect, and manage to smooth over, with this fine apology, all the crimes they hear of in the world; still that one man that robbed them of their all-how stubborn a fact is he, how unreducable to their theory! His very name means all that sin ever means, and they can easily tear out their own hearts, as they can empty that name of the blame it signifies.[2]

Sin, as an inescapable fact of human life, Bushnell found to be reflected in the symbols of art and drama. Shakespeare's "Macbeth," he found to contain the theme of sin and guilt in the human drama. "What means it now for the Lady Macbeth to be crying to the blood,--'Out damned spot!' if there is no longer any such thing as a damned spot of guilt in her murderous soul. Expunge the faith of that, and the rage of remorse turns it at once to comedy--that, and nothing more."[3] Blame and guilt were symptoms of human action and relationship.

> We do then blame ourselves. It is one of the most real and tremendous facts of our consciousness; which, if a man will seek to explain away, by resolving it into cause and effect, it will yet remain, defying and scorning all his arguments. He knows that he himself did the sin, and no cause back of himself. It is a fact, self-

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[2] Ibid., p. 150. [3] Ibid., p. 161.

> pronounced in his consciousness, and of which he can no more divest himself that he can stay the consciousness of his existence. Chloroform may rid him of it, but not argument.[4]

Bushnell held that another evidence of the presence of sin and guilt in man's life was provided by his experience of forgiveness. The fact that there was such an idea or concept as forgiveness, and that it had its expression in human language was testimony to its existence in human experience. Forgiveness was a symbol representative of personal relationships and as such could only be experienced between personal beings.

> Does anyone doubt the reality of forgiveness? Does anyone refuse to commend forgiveness as a necessary and even noble virtue? Forgiveness to what? Forgiveness to cause and effect, forgiveness to the weather, forgiveness to the mildew, or the fly that brings the blasted harvest? No! Forgiveness to wrong, blameable and guilty wrong. Forgiveness and wrong are relative terms. If there is nothing to blame--there is nothing to forgive. One of two things, then, must be true, either that there has been some blameable wrong in the world, or else that the forgiveness we think of, speak of, inculcate and commend, is a baseless phantom, out of all reality, as destitute of dignity and beauty as solidity and truth.[5]

The final argument to substantiate the fact that sin was a common fact of human nature lay in an exposition of the symbols of society, such as the civil structure which presupposes sin and wrong in the world. Law courts and criminal punishment were symbols of the fact.

> We perceive in this manner, how the whole superstructure of the civil order rests on the conviction that sin is

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[4] Ibid., pp. 153-154.

[5] Ibid., p. 159.

> in the world. We assume that it is a fact, the terrible fact of human existence. No one doubts it, save here and there some busy sophist, who thinks to hold his theories against all fact and experience, and against the spontaneous, practical judgments of the race--protected, while he does it, in the very liberty of his mind, and the life of his body, by laws that, under his theory, might as well set themselves to forbid the fermentation of substances, or to arraign and punish the poisonous growth of vegetables.[6]

By illustration, Bushnell sought only to establish that there was in human experience a sense that persons wrong others, and that in doing so, they felt guilty. The feeling of guilt was itself evidence of the existence of the belief that they could have acted otherwise, i.e., maintained right human relationship. Since the sense of sin was associated with feelings of guilt and blame, Bushnell thought that forgiveness arose from the belief that wrong human relationships could be otherwise, i.e., restored to right relationships freed from the feelings of guilt and blame which accompanied the sense of sin. Thus, redemption was in effect the restoration of right relationships between human beings. Bushnell was adamant in his opposition to the rationalist-mechanistic idea of determinism. Determinism, he pointed out, precluded the possibility of any alternative action and consequently destroyed the feeling of guilt which was necessarily related to the sense of sin. Bushnell insisted that, however rationally absurd it might be from the deterministic point of view, men in fact felt, as part

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[6] Ibid., pp. 158-159.

of their human experience, that they were free to choose between wrong human relationships (as sin) and right relationships.

For Bushnell, the question whether man was ultimately free or not was irrelevant. What was relevant, was that man experienced that freedom in his relations with others. That experience was better evidence for freedom than any rationalistic or naturalistic argument about ultimate cause and effect. As a condition of freedom one experienced the possibility of acting for or against the well-being of himself and others without the experience of the consequences of this action. Bushnell called that lack of the experience of consequences a "condition privative."[7] Such a condition was a type of ignorance which could not excuse or destroy man's responsibility because it was an ignorance of the devastating effect of guilt upon himself. In the experience of power and freedom, man might falsely assume that he could wrong his neighbor without accepting the consequences of guilt for himself. In that case, he would be attempting to exercise his freedom and power without accepting the accompanying responsibility which such power brings. But, with the experience of sin, man acquires new knowledge concerning the nature of his freedom. At the same time, he experiences a destruction of his freedom.

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[7] Ibid., p. 108.

Ironically, once man tasted the experience of guilt, he also sensed that his own power to act freely was diminished.

> It may be also objected, as contrary to all experience, as well as to the nature of sin itself, that sin should impart strength, or increase the capacity of virtue. What in fact does it bring, but bondage, and disability, and death? Even so--this is the knowledge of sin, that no-one is the more capable of holiness on account of it. It is very point indeed of this knowledge that it knows disability, helplessness, despair. And exactly this it is that prepares the possibility of a new creation. Impotence discovered is the capacity of redemption.[8]

It is obvious that Bushnell believed that he was appealing to the common experience of men rather than to a priori assumptions concerning the nature of man. He did not wish to establish rational principles concerning either human freedom or natural necessity for sin. His argument was not concerned with ultimate causes, but rather with what he believed to be a description of how men experience themselves and their relations with others. The originality of his understanding of sin was a direct result of his use of his linguistic principles as a basis for the interpretation of human expression concerning the experience of sin. H. Shelton Smith has noted Bushnell's originality concerning the nature of sin in the context of nineteenth century New England thought.

> --It remains clear that he cannot be aligned with the Unitarians and their doctrine of man. Indeed, he stands much closer to Edwardian Calvinism at this point than to Unitarianism. On the other hand, his view of native depravity cannot be equaled with that of either the

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[8] Ibid., p. 116.

> conservative of liberal wing of Edwardianism. Here he is in tension with both Tyler and Taylor, although less with the latter. In reality then, his basic principle of "comprehensiveness," to which he was devoted, led him to formulate a position that was uniquely his own.[9]

It was Bushnell's inability to fit his thought into any particular school of contemporary theology which was responsible for not only misunderstanding, but open hostility.

In his practical work on Christian education, Christian Nurture (1846), Bushnell had attempted to spell out in concrete ways how he conceived the influence of Christian parents to be a means of grace to the child. This topic immediately touched off anew the whole discussion of sin and natural depravity in which Bushnell was never able to satisfy his orthodox or Unitarian critics. Not only did they not understand the basis for his doctrine of sin, they failed to take into consideration the fact that he was battling the revivalist concept that a child was a condemned sinner until he was old enough to be converted and "get a new heart." Bushnell wished to state the other side of the case; that is, that a child should be able to respond to the love of God in Christ even before he knew it was God's love. He could witness it as reflected and mirrored in the lives of his parents.

> In other words, the aim, effort, and expectation should be not, as is commonly assumed, that the child is to grow up in sin, to be converted after he comes to a

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[9]Smith, Changing Conceptions of Original Sin; p. 163.

> mature age; but that he is to open on the world as one that is spiritually renewed, not remembering the time when he went through a technical experience, but seeming rather to have loved what is good from his earliest years.[10]

Thus, Bushnell formulated his oft-quoted and much maligned thesis, "That the child is to grow up a Christian, and never know himself as being otherwise." It was perhaps unfortunate that Bushnell stated his proposition in just that way because he apparently either shocked his critics so thoroughly that they read no further; or, if they read beyond the statement, they did not take his qualifying statements seriously. Indeed, immediately following the statement of his thesis, he remarked, "I do not affirm that every child may, in fact and without exception, be so trained that he certainly will grow up a Christian."[11] Bushnell was conscious of the danger of making the Holy Spirit obey mechanistic and developmental laws.[12] Nevertheless, Charles Hodge led off the criticism with a violent attack on his book:

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[10]Horace Bushnell, Christian Nurture (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1906), p. 10. (Italics mine.)

[11]Ibid. (Italics mine.)

[12]Barbara Cross assumed that Bushnell accepted the associational psychology of revivalism in the sense that the child's will could be moved by the manipulation of emotions. However, it seems clear that Bushnell, entertained the possibility of the child having an experience of God's love in the personal relations of the home, but he wished to avoid the idea of the certain rational manipulation of the will to inevitably produce the desired effect. Barbara M. Cross, Horace Bushnell; Minister to a Changing America (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958), p. 118.

> It is both defective and erroneous as a full statement of the case. It rests on a false assumption of the state of human nature, and of the power of Christian nurture. It assumes that men are not by nature children of wrath, that they are not involved in spiritual death, and consequently that they do not need to be quickened by that mighty power which wrought in Christ when it raised him from the dead. The forming influence of parental character and life is fully adequate to his regeneration; education can correct what there is of natural corruption.[13]

The contemporary Mercersburg theologian, John Nevin, also disliked Bushnell's parental influence theory, "Bushnell's argument seemed to him rationalistic in tendency if not intention. Neither original sin nor the necessity of regeneration by the Holy Spirit was taken seriously enough."[14] It is clear that both Hodge and Nevin understood Bushnell to be a rationalist with a belief in the natural goodness of man which could be "educed" by training. Hodge's use of the term "natural corruption" implied that there was a tendency toward sin in man which was not brought about by his own freedom. The use of the term, "natural corruption," involved a philosophical controversy concerning ultimate causes which Bushnell wanted to avoid. Bushnell had not said that he believed parental influence or education was adequate to correct "natural corruption." Both Nevin and Hodge failed to understand Bushnell's idea of the organic

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[13]Charles Hodge, "Review of Dr. Bushnell's Discourses on Christian Nurture," Biblical Repertory and Princeton Review, XIX (October, 1847), p. 536.

[14]James H. Nichols, Romanticism in American Theology (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1961), p. 243.

community of Christians in the family as being a means of grace. In this way, Bushnell was attempting to take the symbol of infant baptism seriously as against the individualism of revivalism. In order to place the language of Christian Nurture in its proper perspective, it has to be considered against the background of revivalism's radical condemnation of children in sin together with the revivalist's extreme individualism. Indeed, Bushnell asserted his strong belief in the sinful character of human nature a few pages beyond the statement of his thesis which aroused so much controversy.

> There are many who assume the radical goodness of human nature, and the work of Christian education is, in their view, only to educate or educe the good that is in us. Let no one be disturbed by the suspicion of a coincidence between what I have here said and such a theory. The natural pravity of man is plainly asserted in the Scriptures, and, if it were not, the familiar laws of physiology would require us to believe, what amounts to the same thing. And if neither Scripture nor physiology taught us the doctrine, if the child was born as clear of natural prejudice or damage, as Adam before his sin, spiritual education, or, what is the same, probation, that which trains a being for a stable, intelligent virtue hereafter, would still involve an experiment of evil, therefore a fall and a bondage under the laws of evil; so that, view the matter as we will, there is not so reasonable assumption, none so of all just philosophy, as that which proposes to form a child to virtue, by simply educing or drawing out what is in him.[15]

In this statement, Bushnell was trying to change the perspective from which the nature of sin was being debated. He endeavored to return the discussion of sin to the actual

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[15]Bushnell, Christian Nurture, pp. 22-23.

experience of sin in human life rather than let it continue to revolve in abstraction. He considered the philosophical discussion irrelevant because, even if the origin and cause of sin could be settled, it would accomplish no more than to say that sin was a fact which Bushnell believed could be established by observation. Bushnell believed that theology should focus upon the way in which forgiveness and reconciliation operated in the life of man to destroy guilt and restore freedom. What Bushnell did not spell out well enough for his colleagues to understand, was his idea of the family as an agent of the Holy Spirit to bring about the experience of forgiveness and reconciliation. Bushnell believed that within the context of familial love, the "experiment with evil" with its accompanying guilt and the experience of forgiveness and reconciliation could take place. Since, according to Bushnell's observation, sin was the experiment with "wrong" in the experience of human relations while forgiveness was the restoration of the right relation, there could be no more important place for these experiences to occur than in the family where human relations were presumably closest.

What perhaps irritated and antagonized the conservative theologians of Bushnell's day was his denial of the biological transmission of sin. But, that question made so little difference to him that he did not even care to debate it. What was important was the fact that sin was observable

even in childhood and it made no practical difference how it got there. What was even more ironic than his rejection by those with whom he thought he was in basic agreement, was the attempt by the Unitarians to adopt him. The Unitarian, Charles F. Dole, writing in 1899, projected still another image of Bushnell's Christian Nurture.

> Character with him was really salvation. Let children grow up in a warm spiritual atmosphere, so as to become brave, pure, jist, noble, helpful, patriotic, devoted men and women, and this was the essence of Christian nurture. Let the Christ story, in any form enter into the life possess it with faith in God and love to man, and the story thus becoming vital, was effective for the salvation of that life.[16]

As an idealist, Dole assumed that the ideal human nature was struggling to realize itself in the life. Therefore, the "warm spiritual atmosphere" was all that was needed to allow the nobility of the ideal human nature to grow and take possession of life. As noted above, Bushnell did not assume an ideal human nature which could be "educed" by an "atmosphere." For Bushnell, sin was an "experiment with evil."

That Bushnell's ideas of sin and Christian nurture were misunderstood by his contemporaries may be understandable and can be excused in part by the fact that they did not have the perspective of modern writers to view the controversy. It is indeed unfortunate, however, that those same views and evaluations of Bushnell have been accepted

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[16]Charles F. Dole, "Horace Bushnell and His Work for Theology," The New World, VIII (December, 1899), 707.

and repeated by twentieth-century interpreters. Walter Marshall Horton, writing in 1934, remarked:

> In Christian Nurture, Bushnell had already applied this concept of universal divine immanance to the family, and had argued that the child growing up in a Christian home might be ingrafted into the life of God through becoming an organic participant in the life of the family, by a simple developmental process, without the need of any extraordinary and unnatural crisis of conversion.[17]

This is clearly a misconception of Bushnell's work. Bushnell did not maintain that Christian nurture was a "simple developmental process" but rather, as has been seen, "an experiment of evil, therefore a fall and bondage under the laws of evil . . ." As recently as 1962, J. Donald Butler expressed his misgivings that Bushnell's views of home nurture might produce ethical and moral Christians rather than a "first-hand" experience of faith.[18] It is difficult to understand how an "experiment of evil" associated with "fall and bondage" could be other than a "first-hand" experience. Bushnell was not interested in the training of children only for outward behavior. He was more vitally concerned with the personal internal struggle of love overcoming this "bondage." A contribution to Bushnell studies by William Johnson appeared in 1963 in which there was an analysis of Bushnell's ideas of Christian education. The author stated

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[17]Walter Marshall Horton, Realistic Theology (New York and London: Harper and Brothers, 1934), p. 29. (Italics mine.)

[18]J. Donald Butler, Religious Education (New York: Harper and Row, 1962), pp. 102-103.

in his introduction that Bushnell maintained that: "with proper Christian nurture, no child would ever be lost."[19] Taken out of context, that statement appeared to assert a kind of mechanism of which Bushnell was often accused. But, it was really no part of his thought. As has been shown, Bushnell did not believe that proper education would inevitably produce the Christian experience.[20] The meaning of the statement in its context was that the aim and intention of Christian education was that, with proper nurture, no child would be lost. However, it was the work of the Holy Spirit and the freedom of the child's responding will which enabled him to be redeemed.

Bushnell stressed the social implications of sin which affected all mankind and the world. He remarked that he believed the Universe to be moral. The Unitarian, Charles Dole, picked up this statement and reduced it to what is almost a parody of Bushnell's thought.

> Since according to all Bushnell's teaching the universe is moral, and God is moral, and salvation is character; since in all ages men have won and still continue to ennoble his saving character as truly outside as within the lines of this cumbersome evangelical system, what, then, is the use or need of it? You can be Jews, Confucians, Parsees, radical Unitarians, agnostics and still be saved by virtue of character. . . . The wonder is that Bushnell's mind did not push against this question

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[19]William Alexander Johnson, Nature and the Supernatural in the Theology of Horace Bushnell (Lund: C. W. K. Gleerup, 1963), p. 26.

[20]Bushnell, Christian Nurture, p. 10.

and compel for himself the one and only possible answer to it.[21]

Dole failed to distinguish the moral ground of the universe from the actual state of things under the bondage of sin which was central to Bushnell's thought. What Bushnell actually said was that he believed "that natural causes shall react upon all wrong doing in retributive diseases, discords, and pains to correct and chasten the wrong; which, indeed, is the same thing as to say that the world was made to share the fortunes of man, and fall with him in his fall."[22] Thus, because of the loss of the freedom to do good in the fall of every man, even nature which was morally grounded participates by being used and disordered by human sin in the fall of man. The cause and effect action of nature became destructive and demonic and could not correct itself. It could only work retributively. "That such evil and pain do follow, with inevitable certainty, even as all effects follow after their causes, we perceive and almost universally admit; so they are distinguishable in all their four great departments of being--the body, the soul, society, and the world."[23] Here again, Bushnell grounded his theory concerning the moral relation of nature in what he believed to be observable as universal human experience.

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[21]Dole, "Horace Bushnell," p. 709.

[22]Bushnell, Nature and the Supernatural, p. 190.

[23]Ibid., p. 197.

It is certain that he did not ground it on a logical premise or authoritative dogma. H. Shelton Smith has remarked that, "In ignoring Bushnell's emphasis upon the loss of the principle of good in the Fall, some have misunderstood his doctrine of original nature."[24] To this comment could be added the fact that in ignoring the proper historical context of his work and his use of language, many have misunderstood his ideas of Christian nurture.

This chapter has been concerned with the analysis of the fall of man as a dilemma of human experience expressed in cultural language and symbols. We turn now to a discussion of how Bushnell answered this question of existence and how he attempted to meet the dilemma of human bondage with an answer grounded in the experience of life. To make his position clear in distinction to that of the Unitarians, he wrote to his friend, C. A. Bartol.

> We do not sin by homeopathic doses or quantities; no one's sin is done under the principle of obedience; the principle itself must go, and that is a fall, a disability, a state of unnature and bondage. At this point Christianity finds us, and from this raises us by a supernatural lift. And now, being in the hands of life in spite of the great law just named, for which God is perfecting the principle of obedience in us, and we are in him by faith.[25]

Since men and nature were involved in a loss of freedom by

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[24]Smith, Changing Conceptions of Original Sin; p. 161.

[25]Cheney, Life and Letters, p. 231.

the loss of the principle of good, there was no natural process by which man and nature could be extricated from the predicament. The human dilemma of sin was a trap according to Bushnell. It required a power beyond nature to restore the proper function of nature in a moral universe. Bushnell noted that: "We have a condition that, for order's sake, asks an intervention of God's supernatural and powerful hand."[26]

Bushnell believed that his intervention had happened and was taking place in the life of man. He did not support his contention with theoretical argument based on theological or philosophical principles. No rational proofs would enable anyone to perceive the reality of such an intervention. He was content instead, to point out the witness of the experience of human sin in life as the counterpart to the witness to the experience of human redemption. He did this by referring to the conversions of Augustine, Paul, and other Christians.

> We are all familiar, certainly, with such examples. They are among the most prominent and perfect facts, in the interior, personal history of mankind. And they are well tested, in myriads of cases, that the practical results of a life, as to make the unbelief which denies their verity, or classes it as examples of spiritual illusion, a prejudice that amounts to weakness, or supposes a real incapacity for evidence.[27]

Thus, Bushnell believed that by grappling with the

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[26]Bushnell, Nature and the Supernatural, p. 342.

[27]Ibid., p. 433.

actual testimonies of redemption by men in life, one was confronted with the same kind of evidence as one found for sin. If the experience of sin came out of life, so also must the experience of redemption. If one discards all the other testimony of reason and argument, he was still faced by those witnesses in history which he had to take into account.

> Herein we find ourselves, with these facts on our hands, without any Christian truth to account for them. For when we have dismissed the gospels, or thrown them aside as unreliable, or incredible, these facts are not annihilated. These converts, these characters in human history--are still left, living and blooming and blessing their times, for all these eighteen centuries. They certainly are no fictions, or myths, or fables of tradition. They testify, all, that they are consciously transformed by some divine power. A kind of gospel is in them.[28]

Bushnell had discovered the nature of sin through an analysis of human expression concerning the experience of sin. The nature of redemption was discovered in the same way, that is, by an analysis of the human expression or language of redemption. He undertook to investigate the confessions of those Christian witnesses who had claimed the experience of redemption and recognized that the nature of the redemptive experience was not to be observed in terms of impersonal force of argument or the principle of law, but rather in terms of personal relations. "The whole operation, it will be observed, supposes the condition privative in the

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[28]Ibid., p. 434.

subject, such that he suffers, at first, a kind of repulsion by the law, and is only won to it by embracing the goodness of it in a personal friend and deliverer."[29] The content of this redemptive experience was summed up by Bushnell in words similar to those of the Apostle Paul, "Old things are past away, and all things are become new; because God is revealed within, changing, of course, the principle of all action, and the meaning of all experience."[30]

Since, according to Bushnell, human sin brought society into discord, human redemption brought society into harmony. He did not arrive at this "organic" theory of human community through a deductive process from a theological principle, but "by simply analyzing social psychology."[31] The interdependence of human relationships was seen not only in the contagion of sin, but also in the redemptive process of Christian experience.

> Bushnell rejected the highly individualistic concept of the earlier thinkers that man is an independent moral agent. He assumed instead that man is made to act responsively in community with God and his fellow man. Since man never acts in complete isolation from this community and from a particular situation, the moral quality of activity will be determined in large measure by the character of these communal relationship and his ability will vary with the demands and potentialities of the situation in which he is required to act.[32]

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[29] Ibid., p. 120.

[30] Ibid., p. 390.

[31] Nichols, Romanticism, p. 242.

[32] E. Clinton Gardner, "Horace Bushnell's Concept of Response: A Fresh Approach to the Doctrine of Ability and Inability," Religion in Life, XXVII (Winter, 1957-1958), 125.

Both the Transcendentalists and the Revivalists of the period had stressed the individuality of both sin and redemption.[33] Bushnell, however, saw that independence and individuality were not true in the expression of actual human experience. His assumptions led him to conclude that men were tied together, both in their fall and redemption by their personal relations. According to Dillenberger and Welch, Bushnell

> emphasized the overwhelming importance of social environment in the development of character. Men are indeed united in sin, he asserted, not in some formal legal sense or through biological inheritance, but through their common involvement in the social texture in which personality is formed. And if sin is social, so is virtue. Men cannot be redeemed in isolation from society, but only in and with it. There is social solidarity both in sin and in salvation.[34]

For Bushnell, then, sin was a fact of human consciousness as man exists in relation to other men in the human community. That fact was discoverable in the symbolism of human language which portrayed how man understood and felt about himself. Thus, according to Bushnell, sin was not an invention of the church and its theologians, but a malady of human experience. By his view of human language as symbolic of

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[33]Emerson's definition of individualism as uniqueness and nonconformity surpassed even that of the frontier period. Ralph H. Gabriel, "Evangelical Religion and Popular Romanticism in Early 19th Century America," Church History, XIX (March, 1950), 42.

[34]John Dillenberger and Claude Welch, Protestant Christianity (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1954), p. 244.

the inner experience of man, and the use of his method of comprehensiveness, Bushnell grounded his understanding of sin in the language of human experience.

CHAPTER VII

NATURE AND THE SUPERNATURAL

It would be beyond the scope of this study to attempt to deal with every facet of Bushnell's concept of nature and the supernatural. Accordingly, this portion of this work will be limited to a consideration of Bushnell's understanding of nature and the supernatural in relation to his linguistic epistemology. Bushnell believed that the two levels of human language were expressions of the two levels of human experience commonly called subjective and objective. In the previous chapter, it was shown how Bushnell grounded his concept of sin in human consciousness by analyzing the forms of human expression in language and institutions. Bushnell came to believe that since sin could not be accounted for in a natural system of cause and effect, there was more to the testimony of the human expression of consciousness than could be comprehended by the objective analysis of natural causes. Thus, there was an experience above nature; a supernatural experience in the sense that it was an experience beyond the cause and effect of contingent nature. It was in the supernatural experience that freedom

was exercised. He rejected the objection put forth by naturalistic philosophers that freedom was an illusion and that man in fact lives within a total system of deterministic cause and effect.

> The nature of the objection is purely imaginary, as, in fact, the common sense, if we should rather say the common consciousness of the world decides; for we are all conscious of acting from ourselves uncaused in our action. The murdered knows within himself that he did the deed, and that nothing else did it through him. So his consciousness testifies--so the consciousness of every man revising his actions--and no real philosopher will undertake to substitute the verdict of consciousness, by another, which he has arrived at only be speculation or a logical practice in words. The sentence of consciousness is final.[1]

What perhaps disturbed Bushnell most was the claim common to naturalism and science to have displaced the supernatural by the rational process in nature. He felt that this was not only a false application of science but a misunderstanding of human language. The naturalists seemed to threaten the very depth of human personal existence by their denial of the supernatural and its operation in human life. This conflict, sometimes called the "science and religion controversy," deeply affected Bushnell living in the mid-nineteenth century. He witnessed the greatly accelerated progress of natural science and he felt that any controversy between religion and science must stem from a defective method on one side or the other.

There is no real discord between them. The natural and

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[1]Bushnell, Nature and the Supernatural, p. 46.

> the supernatural, science and faith, have a unity of relation as complete as any right and left hand. And yet it has not hitherto been easily discovered; for we have just now a large dissention on hand that disallows all miracles, takes away the possibility of prayer and weakens and shades, in a thousand ways, the face of religion itself. It is partly the fault of a narrow-minded way in the disciples and professed champions of religion, and partly the fault of an over-hasty and falsely tempered intellectual conceit, in the forward teachers and expounders of nature. The schism is an old one, really as old as the world; viz., a conflict between thinking and believing; only the strife is now being drawn closer as the system of science and the habit of thinking in terms of causes are more stringently set.[2]

Bushnell recalled the period of the Sophists in Greek philosophy and likened their period to his own. The Sophists had set out with their "dialectic quibbles" to destroy "religious superstition."[3] "It was poetry on one side and dialectics were, in this case, more than a match for the poetry,--as they ever must be, until their real weakness and the cheat of their pretensions are discovered."[4] The danger was in reducing human language to the level of mathematical equations or mechanical functions. One had to realize that the language forms of human expression had a great deal more

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[2]Bushnell, Building Eras in Religion, p. 28.

[3]Bushnell's description of the "sophists" is more applicable to the Milesian School of naturalism and the Pythagorean mathematics which attempted to break down the Homeric mythical world view by finding origins and causes in nature and rational order. The Sophists, Protagoras, and Gorgias, were, in fact, much closer to Bushnell in their discovery of cultural relativity and their stress on linguistic study.

[4]Bushnell, Nature and the Supernatural, p. 15.

to say than could be handled by those equations. Poetry cannot be reduced to prose without losing the subjective meaning it had for human life.

Thus, according to Bushnell, there were two stumbling blocks to the acceptance of the supernatural by modern man. The first was the permeation of confidence in the scientific method of objective analysis which imprisoned human beings within the world in cause and effect. The great success of the objective level in understanding man and his world had produced the faith that ultimately all human experience might be adequately understood by this method. Mythical and symbolic language ceased to have meaning when objectively analyzed into propositions and were, therefore, declared superstition. Bushnell saw that the reinvigoration of faith in the supernatural was confronted with a second stumbling block, one which had been put in the way by New England orthodoxy itself. The orthodox theologians had given up the ground of conversation with science and naturalism. They had conceived God to be so transcendent in his sovereignty that his immanence was difficult to conceive. "The idea of God as spectacularly and intermittently active in the world had all but obscured the idea of God as continuously operative within the world process. The principle of discontinuity was clearly the major principle of New England

orthodoxy."[5] Bushnell recognized that to an empirically oriented culture, the authority of tradition was not sufficient to establish faith in the supernatural. He also recognized that theology would have to ground its statements on the perception of actual human experience if it were to re-receive a hearing in the modern world. It has already been noted that Bushnell attempted to develop a statement concerning the nature of sin based on his analysis human experience. Here again one finds the application of Bushnell's method of comprehensiveness. He could not accept the imprisoning of human life within the confines of cause and effect in nature. He battled that notion at every turn. However, when he was confronted by the extreme transcendence of God in orthodox thought, he remarked, "Pantheism has a great truth, and is even wanted as a balance of recification of the common error that places God afar off, outside of his works or above, in some unimagined altitude."[6] Bushnell was repulsed by the alternatives of orthodoxy or naturalism. He felt that both sides were contending for a truth about God. But, either side standing alone was false. "If traditional supernaturalism was no longer convincing to him, he drew back from the implications of naturalism. Bushnell undertook to maintain the principle of 'the rigid unity of the

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[5]H. Shelton Smith, Faith and Nurture (New York: Charles Scribner and Sons, 1941), p. 6.

[6]Bushnell, Nature and the Supernatural, p. 30.

system of God' and yet make a real place for the activity of the supernatural in that unified system."[7]

In 1858, Bushnell published the results of his investigation of this subject in a volume called, Nature and the Supernatural as Together Constituting the One System of God. He stated his purpose in writing the book to be "simply this; to find a legitimate place for the supernatural in the system of God and show it as a necessary part of the divine system itself."[8] There was nothing original in an attempt by a theologian to argue the case for the supernatural. What was unique to Bushnell was his method in which he attempted to ground the idea of the supernatural in human experience and thereby make it impossible for science or philosophy to ignore it.

> Indeed the great difficulty heretofore encountered, in establishing the faith of a supernatural agency, has been due to the fact that we have made a ghost of it; discussing it as if it were a marvel of superstition, and no definite and credible reality. Whereas, it will appear, as we confront our difficulty more thoughtfully and take its full force, that the moment we begin to conceive ourselves rightly, we become ourselves supernatural. It is no longer necessary to go hunting after marvels, apparitions, suspensions of the laws of nature, to find the supernatural; it meets us in what is least transcendent and most familiar, even ourselves. In ourselves we discover a tier of existences that are above nature and, in all their ordinary actions, are doing their will upon it. The very idea of our personality is that of a being not under cause and effect, a being

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[7]Smith, Faith and Nurture, p. 7.

[8]Bushnell, Nature and the Supernatural, p. 31.

supernatural.[9]

The foundation of Bushnell's argument for the supernatural rested upon the testimony of human consciousness. In order to be clear about the definition of nature distinguished from the supernatural, Bushnell perceived the distinction in human experience as the difference between "things and persons" or "things and powers."[10] The level of the personal was the supernatural, the level of objects was the natural.

Nature, for Bushnell, was a chain of causes and effects determined from within the chain itself. Man experienced this causal order in the things of his world, but he experienced something else within himself. Subjectively, he experienced a realm "whatever it may be, that is either not in the chain of cause and effect, or which acts on the chain of cause and effect, in nature, from without the chain."[11] For Bushnell, that realm was the supernatural; that is, it was beyond nature and did not act according to the laws of things. Rather, the supernatural sphere was governed by its own law which could be called the law of the personal. Man's life could not be conceived within a cause-effect solution of his own motivation and actions since his subjective consciousness told him otherwise. Men "may drive themselves into it, for the moment, by their speculations; but

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[9] Ibid., pp. 42-43.

[10] Ibid., p. 84.

[11] Ibid., p. 37.

the desert is too dry, and the air too thin--they cannot stay."[12] Bushnell illustrated that point by referring to the historical yearning of the human race for something supernatural. The expression of that yearning in the literary and cultural forms of every civilization had far outweighed the quest for scientific and objective knowledge. In fact, Bushnell found the whole structure of society to be built upon the supernatural as illustrated in the terms of its language.

> Love, benefit, sympathy, injury, hatred, thanks, blame, character, worship, faith,--all that constitutes the reality of society, whether of men with God or men with each other belongs to the fact that we are consciously powers. Strip us of this, let all these fruits be regarded as mere dynamic results, under the head of natural philosophy, and they will change, at once, to be mere tricks, or imposters of natural magic.[13]

Bushnell found further support for this argument in the particular life situations of men who exerted their freedom in heroic acts. The martyrs of every age felt themselves to be driven by a higher law and power. Admiration was not felt for "the mere distillation of natural causes . . . but it is a man, the sense we have of a man, rising out of the level of things, great above all things, great as being himself."[14] Here the supernatural could be seen on the plane of historical action and its meaning was to be found beyond the determinism of nature. "In demonstrations like these

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[12] Ibid., p. 66.

[13] Ibid., p. 100.

[14] Ibid., pp. 57-58.

. . . we meet the spontaneous verdict of man, apart from all theories, and quibbles, and Sophistries of argument, testifying that man is a creature out of mere nature--a free cause in himself--great therefore, in the majesty of great virtues and heroic acts."[15] Thus, for Bushnell, the distinction between nature and the supernatural was the self-determination of the conscious experience of human beings who felt themselves able to decide and act and vary their reactions in dealing with the realm of nature.

> Self-determination, therefore, as respects, the mere will as a power of volition, is essentially indestructible. And it is this gift of power, this originative liberty, constituting, as it does, the central attribute of personality, that gives us impressions of what is personal in character, so different from any that can be connected with mere cause and effect. In every friend we distinguish something more than a distillation of natural causes; a free faithful soul, that, having a power to betray, stays fast in the integrity of love and sacrifice.[16]

By the foregoing argument Bushnell made it clear that he "finds a place for the supernatural in the scheme of existence itself; showing that we ourselves are supernatural agents," and that "supernatural facts" are "among the known realities."[17] Nature has been shown not to be, "in any proper sense, the universe."

Bushnell felt that he had demonstrated a realm of experience which might be called supernatural. But the relation between nature and the supernatural needed further

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[15] Ibid., p. 58. [16] Ibid., p. 56. [17] Ibid., p. 520.

investigation. Nature was the realm of objective perception which, in itself, was amoral. The supernatural experience was the moral experience in which decisions were made to be carried out in the cause-effect relations of nature.[18] Nature was the stage upon which, and in which, the supernatural manifested its force and authority by the manipulation of cause and effect relations. Nature and the supernatural were related like body and soul in that the body had its own law of functioning which the soul or spirit may use for its own purpose. Therefore, according to Bushnell, nature and the supernatural together constituted one system in God's plan.

Bushnell considered the question concerning the kind and limit of freedom and power in the realm of the supernatural. He warned against the mistaken practice of importing definitions and laws from the physical world into the supernatural. The supernatural had its own way of operating. "We say that a realm of powers is not, by the supposition to be governed as a realm of things, that is, by direct omnipotence, not power, in the sense of influence, or moral impression, but mere executive force."[19] When Bushnell spoke of "power," he was speaking of moral persuasion and influence rather than the naked force which one sees exhibited in cause and effect in nature. The power of the

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[18] Ibid., pp. 58-59.

[19] Ibid., p. 94.

supernatural was experienced as quite a different thing than the power of the physico-natural world. Authority which resorted to physical force ceased to be an authority which was responded to because it was an authority. Truth, justice, beauty, and love could not be forced upon the human being; rather they had to call forth a response of decision and commitment from the person. The power of the supernatural or personal world was a moral power which influenced the power of consent or dissent in human existence. "The words person, spirit, soul, mind, intelligence, free agents all, presupposed a consciousness of that state or relation."[20]

Bushnell believed that the testimony of human consciousness in its forms of expression exposed two levels of human experience; the supernatural realm of moral power, and the natural realm made active by the supernatural. As pointed out in the previous chapter, there was another facet of human consciousness, one which interpenetrates both realms of experience. That was the experience of sin which was the complicating factor of both realms of human life. Bushnell thought that sin in human consciousness was the disabling factor of existence. Having exercised his moral power of disobedience and rejection in the supernatural realm, man turned to the natural realm where he sought to manipulate

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[20]Ibid., p. 88.

the laws of cause and effect according to his own plans and purpose. Thus even nature, being set in motion by the perverse exercise of the human moral power, now acts against its own creative intent. "Manifestly nature cannot rescue from the disorders, produced by the retributive actions of her own causes. And if God's actions were included in the operations of nature, nothing plainly could ever be done for man, as regards the wants of his sin, the cries of his repentance, or the struggle of his faith."[21] According to Bushnell, a miracle was needed to restore the broken order. A miracle "is a supernatural act, an act, that is, which operates on the chain of cause and effect in nature from without the chain, producing, in the sphere of the senses, some event that moves our wonder, and evinces the presence of a more than human power."[22] It is clear that Bushnell conceived the supernatural realm to be apart from the physical and above it in the sense that its power superseded or was superior to that of the natural. The miracle, then, "moves our wonder," because it appeared to contravene the physical laws which governed the ordinary natural order of our experience.

The questions which confronted man in the context of his conscious experience, concerned his freedom and its relation to sin and guilt. According to Bushnell, those

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[21] Ibid., p. 406.

[22] Ibid., p. 336.

were supernatural problems which required a supernatural answer. The solution to supernatural problems could not be found in nature because nature itself had no freedom. Nature was order as determined by the laws which governed its operation, e.g., the law of causality. Only Christian faith supplied the supernatural answers to the supernatural questions of man's life.

> Christianity is therefore supernatural, not because it acts through the laws of nature, limited by, and doing the work of, the laws; but because it acts regeneratively and new--creatively to repair the damage which those laws, in their penal action, would otherwise perpetrate. Its very distinction as a redemptive agency, lies in the fact that it enters into nature, in this regenerative and rigidly supernatural way, to reverse and restore the lapsed condition of sinners.[23]

Once he had established his belief that the questions of human existence were supernatural, and that their form was to be seen in the language of symbol, Bushnell attempted to illustrate how the symbolic forms of Christianity communicated supernatural answers to subjective questions man asked about his life. As Bushnell viewed the matter, it was the task of theology to express the supernatural answers and show how moral power could change the way man viewed himself and his world.

There was an analogical correspondence between Bushnell's understanding of the nature and function of language and his doctrine of nature and the supernatural. Human

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[23] Ibid., p. 42.

language reflected the experience of nature and the supernatural in its two-story structure. The literal or denotative function corresponded to nature, while the figurative or symbolic function corresponded to the supernatural realm. The personal, unique, and moral experience of human beings could only be comprehended by figurative and symbolic language. The physical and mechanical structure of nature, on the other hand, could be set forth by the literal terms of scientific language. Bushnell's discovery of the analogous relation between language and human experience provided him with the pattern for his demonstration of nature and the supernatural. He thought that the literal-figurative realms of expression revealed the system of God. Throughout his discussions of the subject, Bushnell was careful to avoid any implication that might be construed to the effect that he regarded the supernatural as a literal reality which exists in some mysterious transcendence grounded upon any a priori assumption. His concern was to establish a meaning for the word "supernatural" which would have relevance to human experience and enable theology to rehabilitate itself with an epistemology compatible with historical relativism. The following chapters will illustrate Bushnell's constructive ability in theology to communicate and express the meaning of historic Christian doctrines.

PART IV

FORM OF THEOLOGY:
THE RELATION OF LINGUISTIC PRINCIPLES
TO THEOLOGICAL EXPRESSION

CHAPTER VIII

CHRISTOLOGY

In the previous chapter, it was noted that Bushnell relegated all personal relations and moral questions to the realm of the supernatural. The supernatural was communicated in symbols or poetic form. The expression of the experience of sin, guilt, justice, truth, and freedom, for example, were always symbolic or poetic in form. Moreover, the meaning of those symbols could not be translated from poetry into a sign language representing intellectual ideas without losing the original intent and truth in terms of the context of the human experience which brought them into being. Bushnell did not conceive the task, to be one of changing the forms of scripture into philosophical or logical propositions, but to comprehend these forms in the context of the supernatural plane, that is, as stories or forms that moved men by moral power and thereby produced understanding and commitment. He objected to the translation of mythical symbols into abstract concepts which could be comprehended only by rational manipulation. To translate those symbols in that way could have no other effect than to

destroy the subjective meaning in the same way that it was violated in literalization.

> Some persons appear to suppose that Christianity is distinguished by the fact that it has finally cleared us of all ritualities or objectivities, introducing a purely subjective and philosophic or ideal piety. This they fancy is the real distinction between Judaism and Christianity. They do not conceive that Christianity rather fulfills Judaism than displaces it--that, while it dismisses the outward rites and objectivities of the old religion, it does, in fact, erect them as the divine form of the Christian grace for all future time. Thus, instead of a religion before the eyes, we now have one set up in language before the mind's eye, one that is almost as intensely objective as the other, only that it is mentally so, or as addressed to thought.[1]

To rid religion of symbolic form was to deny its relevance to human existence. All meaningful and relevant answers to the human dilemma had to be expressed and understood in forms which related to the human experience of life and of self. Therefore, Bushnell saw Christ as "god's metaphor," that is, the expression of God's beauty, truth, justice, righteousness, and forgiveness on the plan of human existence.

> And if we do not take the Word in some light, frivolous, merely rhetorician way, we can say nothing of Christ so comprehensively adequate as to call him the metaphor of God; God's last metaphor! And when we have gotten all the metaphoric meanings out of his life and death, all that is expressed and embodied in his person of God's saving help and new creation, sin-forgiving, reconciling love, the sooner we dismiss all speculations on the literalities of his incarnate miracles, his derivation, the composition of his person, his suffering,--plainly transcendent as regards out understand,--the wiser shall we

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[1]Bushnell, God in Christ, p. 249.

> be in our discipleship. We shall have him as the expressed image of God's person.[2]

Bushnell's use of the term metaphor was appropriate to his consciousness of the nature of language and its influence upon the formulation of his theology. Christ was God's metaphor because it was in the visible Christ that man perceived the invisible God. Here Bushnell discovered the same kind of relationship between God and Christ that he had found to obtain between human experience and expression. Christ was not to be conceived as literally God. Rather he stood for and represented God for the human being. Thus Christ had to be understood as the accommodated form of God to human understanding just as human expression was the accommodated form of experience. One will become "wiser in his discipleship," Bushnell remarked if he refrained from trying to literally imitate the life of Christ from the gospel stories. To do so was as futile as the effort to literalize a metaphor. Rather, it was in spiritual contemplation that the Gospel stories did their transforming work in man. It was then that God's expression of himself became an impression on one's own existence and not a general law applied to external behaviour. The meaning of the Gospel stories had to be subjectively and personally understood in the particular experience of the individual.

In commenting on the Gospel of John, Bushnell

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[2]Bushnell, Building Eras in Religion, p. 259.

adopted the theme that when Christ came into the world, he came into a world which was created to be in harmony with his own nature. "When he came, he came not as an intruder defiant of all previous order in nature, but as coming into 'his own,' to fulfill the creative ideas centered in his person, and to complete the original order of the plan."[3] If the presence of Christ appeared to be disruptive of human existence. The disorder introduced by sin into both the natural and supernatural realms meant that human existence was out of harmony with its original creative purpose and plan in God. The purpose of Christ was to redeem man and bring the creative order of God into a chaotic human existence. The true answer to the question who was Christ was "that He is, externally viewed a union of God and man, whose object is to humanize the conception of God, and so to express or communicate God."[4] Bushnell could not ignore the necessity for grounding the Christian faith in historical action because he recognized that all truth had to have its form in particular times and places. Thus, there was no "disembodied" eternal truth which could be grasped by man who lives his life on the plane of historical action. The truth had to enter into the world as historical form and find a body to communicate itself.

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[3]Bushnell, Nature and the Supernatural, p. 32.

[4]Bushnell, Christ in Theology, p. 93.

> It is to be seen beforehand that He [Christ] is not given as a riddle to our curiosity, or that we may set ourselves to reason out His mystery, but simply that God made us express His own feelings and draw Himself into union with us, by an act of accommodation to our human sympathies and capacities.[5]

The story of Christ in the Gospels was the story of God's action in human history. God accommodated Himself to human understanding and communication by being in human form. Man could not go beyond the form of God's presentation in human experience to penetrate the divine mystery since there was, in God himself, no form that man could know except that in which He offered Himself in existence. Man had to be content to be man and to communicate with God in the forms in which God had expressed Himself. These forms, as all human forms, were relative to the absolute nature of God and should not be absolutized as idols or systematized into speculative equations to account for the interior nature of God. Bushnell remarked that in his approach to theology

> it will be seen that nothing is done save simply to show how the forms in which God is offered to our faith may be used so as to get their true meaning and be themselves the truth to us. The fundamental principle assumed in this is this and no other,--that the value of the Word rests in the impressions it is to produce in us, and not in the theories or scientific versions we are to produce from it.[6]

Bushnell's linguistic presuppositions were evident in his Christology in that he considered the form always to be relative to the truth it conveyed while at the same time the

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[5] Ibid.

[6] Ibid., p. 91.

form was necessary to communicate truth in human existence. Bushnell made no claim to knowledge beyond the relative and accommodated forms which can be experienced in the time-space existence of man. The existential experience of man was the limiting frame of Bushnell's epistemology and he saw no reason nor any possibility of going beyond that limit.

Bushnell's approach to Christology was unique in nineteenth century New England. His uniqueness was summarized by H. Shelton Smith.

> With Horace Bushnell there emerged in American thought a type of liberal Christology that failed to fit exclusively into the ideology either of current orthodoxy or of Unitarianism. Bushnell believed himself to be orthodox; yet current orthodoxy sharply criticized his idea of Jesus. On the other hand, Unitarians did not find his view of Jesus satisfactory to them. The fact seems to be that he recognized elements of truth in both parties, yet not enough in either, or in both, to do justice to his understanding of Jesus.[7]

Bushnell's method of comprehensiveness made him recognize that both the orthodox and Unitarians were contending for a truth concerning the nature of Christ. Neither position, however, was satisfactory since both parties refused to interpret the forms of the Gospels in their proper sense. The orthodox had either solidified the forms in literality, or reduced them to precise statements of dogma. The Unitarians, to the contrary, had for the most part, denied the supernatural elements of the Christological forms and mistakenly thought that they had thereby liberated a great

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[7]Smith, Faith and Nurture, p. 21.

human teacher from the "ignorant" and "superstitious" stories of the Gospels. Bushnell wished to make it clear that with his definition, the supernatural could not only be seen as part of the human experience of Christ, but indeed could not be denied. The thought forms of the Gospels dealt with the personal and corporate experience of human beings confronted by this Christ. They were therefore, supernatural.

> No that everything written, or advanced in the canonical books of the New Testament, is historic fact, or infallible truth--our present supposition does not reach so far as that, but leaves a space to be filled up by other kinds of argument--it simply supposes that all such prominent ideas, tokens, facts, and doctrines as we have named--that is, everything which goes to shape the new economy, as being integral to it--is brought into knowledge and published to the world supernaturally.[8]

Bushnell aimed his attack at those Unitarians and Transcendentalists who had denied the supernatural element in Christology. It might appear that there was little in Bushnell's language which would deny the Transcendentalist interpretation of Christ as a moral teacher who taught the eternal truth of God to men. However, it must be remembered that the context of Bushnell's words set him apart from the Transcendentalist's understanding of Christ. He spoke from a conception of man as he experientially existed, i.e., as a sinner unable to exercise his freedom as a moral power in the supernatural world. For Bushnell, Christ was more than a teacher. Christ was a redeemer, who, not being trapped by

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[8]Bushnell, Nature and the Supernatural, pp. 339-400.

sin, demonstrated the moral power which calls men out of their sin to recognize their true human being.

On other occasions, Bushnell struck out against the reductionism and philosophical creed-making of scholasticism.

> . . . The whole Christ, taken as He is, makes up the gospel, fills out the power, and that no summary more comprehensive can do more than hint the purpose and manner of it. There is no example of mortal conceit more astounding, if we could only see the matter with a proper intelligence, than the assumption that the import of Christ's mission can be fairly and sufficiently stated in a dogma of three lines.[9]

Bushnell sought to show how orthodoxy had reversed the order of Christian faith by making faith a case of mechanical assent to a formula imposed by the authority of the church. Christian faith, Bushnell contended, was an impression made upon the hearts of men by the expression of God in the incarnate Christ. As one encountered the expressions and claims of the gospel in the forms of scripture, they spoke of life and of living persons rather than providing simple statements about life.

> The real gospel is the Incarnate Biography itself, making its impression and workings its effect as a biography--a total life with all its acts, and facts, and words, and feelings, and principles of good, grouped in the light and shade of their own supernatural unfolding. Whereupon the scientific words--man, coming after, undertakes to adequately tell what the grand biography is, or amounts to, in three or four lines of dry abstractive statement! . . . Will then someone undertake to give us Othello by dogmatic articles? or, if not, will it be

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[9]Bushnell, The Vicarious Sacrifice, pp. 30-31.

more easy to give us the tragedy of Jesus?[10]

Bushnell refused to accept the scriptural symbols of offering, sacrifice, Lamb of God, etc., applied to Jesus as historical literalities. They were poetic symbols by which God in his gospel presented himself in Christ.[11] The Gospels were not constructed merely to relate events, but to provide evidence of the meaning expressed in the events relating to Christ. The meaning of symbolic forms used in the Gospels could not have been perceived in the event as viewed by everyone. Those forms instead conveyed the meaning of those contingent historical occurrences to men and women who were able to perceive the revelation of God's action in the event. Bushnell insisted that the scripture did not relate the life events of a human being. The Gospel writers testified and purported to see and experience something more in him. That testimony had to be taken seriously even though it might not agree with any particular set of presuppositions.

> If Christ was only a . . . natural man, and if all which is reported of him in the gospel transcending the supposition of His simple humanity, is wild excess, or legendary exaggeration, the account which refers to these inward changes or conversion to Christ, can hardly be true.[12]

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[10] Ibid., p. 31.

[11] Bushnell, Nature and the Supernatural, pp. 433-434.

[12] Ibid.

Bushnell believed that the Scriptures did not allow, in their presentation, the construction of a human psyche of Jesus. The Gospels presented Christ in action, not his inner thoughts. Thus it was impossible for one to construct a simple human life of Jesus from the records. "If there be any passages of Scripture which go beyond external expression, opening to us the interior psychology of Christ's person, that is a distinct matter. I know of none that do it, or can even be supposed to do it."[13] Therefore, Bushnell ruled out the Unitarian-Transcendentalist Christology that Christ was no more than an excellent human teacher on the ground that the records did not provide evidence to support it.

Bushnell was equally critical of the orthodox attempt to prove the divinity of Christ by the miracles.

> It used to be the practice of theologians, to cite the miracles of Christ as proofs of his doctrine, and even of the gospel history; not observing that the conditions of the question are entirely changed since the days of the first witness . . . But to those who saw them not, to us who have heard of them only by the report of history, they can never be cited as proofs because the main thing to be settled, with us, is the verity of the facts themselves. The gospel history, instead of being attested to us by the miracles, has them rather as a heavy burden resting on its own credibility. Doubtless, it is true that, if such a being as Christ were to come into the world, on such an errand as the gospel reports, we should look to see him verify his mission by miracles, and without the miracles we should suspect the authenticity of his pretensions.[14]

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[13]Bushnell, Christ in Theology, p. 96.

[14]Bushnell, Nature and the Supernatural, p. 333.

Bushnell was referring to the empirical tradition within Protestant scholasticism as represented by Locke's defense of the miracle stories as demonstrations of Christ's Divinity.[15] The Lockean conception of language as a single level structure which permitted abstract definitions saw no logical barrier to the interpretation of words from one historical era by another. Bushnell, however, offered an interpretation of language which he believed provided him with a more sophisticated understanding of historical sources. He realized that the miracle stories were not literal descriptions of events, but interpretations of the experience of the events as observed by men of that time. Consequently, it would be futile to expect those conditions to have the same meaning or be expressed in the same way by observers from a different situation in time. Because of his view of the relativity of historical expression, Bushnell came to the conclusion that the miracles were not proofs of the divinity of Christ, but only a part of the whole Gospel form in which the divine presence was represented. The miracles demanded authentication as much as did the rest of the record of Jesus. For Bushnell, the only authentication of the gospel rested in the inward transformation of persons as they were impressed by God's expression of himself in the acts of Christ as reported in the gospels. Those forms had

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[15]John Locke, The Reasonableness of Christianity as Delivered in the Scriptures (1695).

to stand in their relation to the complete story and not be altered by the authority of reason or the church. They had to be grasped as the testimonies of the experience of faith and could only be apprehended through a sensitivity to their symbolic language.

Bushnell believed that the Christological controversies were for the most part irrelevant and were the result of the failure to properly understand the gospel forms. He only allowed himself to become involved in the controversies to show why he could not become involved in them. The Christological controversies erred by literalizing the accommodated or metaphoric forms of the gospel. For example, the true incarnation as understood by the orthodox became irrelevant if not absurd once the humanity of Jesus was appreciated as being a definition or representation of what was projected from the common understanding of man.

> . . . For, instead of having God Himself presented or expressed, a man is found hid in miracle, who is doing and suffering, in his distinct humanity, precisely that which God assumed to be the medium of His own manifestation! It is just as if it were insisted that the word fire, applied to the burning bush must be taken in its properly normal sense, as having a property that burns wood! Instead of reasoning in this way we should first of all acknowledge the miracle, and then begin to ask what God will teach us.[16]

Bushnell pointed out that the formula "two natures in one person" has historically caused great difficulty because it has been subjected to philosophical and logical manipulation

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[16]Bushnell, Christ in Theology, pp. 98-99.

which rendered the statement absurd. Considered as a formula, it could only be interpreted as a paradox comprehended in the experience of Christian faith. Thus, the pointless controversy had resulted from asking the wrong question. Instead of: "How can this be?" the question should have been: "What does it teach or express?"

> The mystery itself is divided up and gone,--the man has taken one part of himself, the Word has taken the other back into the secret of God's pavilion, and God manifest, the Word made flesh, is not here any longer! This result will always follow when the formula "two natures as one person" is taken speculatively; but if it be taken in that instrumental and merely exterior way of which I spoke, and the practical reality of all be considered to lie in what is expressed in the incarnate mystery, no such result will follow Christ will then be one person--only one. He cannot be divided.[17]

Bushnell further objected to the two-nature theory of Jesus person because he believed that it tended to be subversive of the incarnation. At the same time that it affirmed one person in Christ, it injected a division by speaking of two natures. If the divine side of Christ did not really unite with the human so as to constitute one being, then God did not really become man in the flesh.[18] Bushnell maintained that one had to hold the strict unity of Christ's person, but he also demonstrated that attempt to penetrate this mystery of incarnation by human language inevitably conveyed both a truth and an untruth. That duality of truth--untruth was the consequence of the relative and accommodated nature

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[17] Ibid., p. 107.

[18] Smith, Faith and Nurture, p. 22.

of the forms of language. Bushnell's main concern was to avoid the development of a single true statement about Christology because he realized that many statements could be made and had been made about the nature of Christ which were both true and untrue depending upon the approach and context in which the problem was viewed.[19] From his point of view, the meaning of the words "incarnation," "God," and "man" had to be constantly investigated and expressed in many ways. Should their meaning settle into the stagnation of one acceptable form, they would lose their power to continually generate and stimulate the experience of divine-human encounter.

The point at which Bushnell's Christology has been traditionally criticized lays in his conception of the humanity of Christ. Some critics stated that Bushnell denied Christ's humanity.[20] It is certainly true that he made statements which appeared to allow that conclusion, but upon examination it will become evident that they were

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[19]For example, the Christological controversy at the Council of Chalcedon (451) resulted in the rejection of the Monophysite Creed and the statement of Nestorius on the ground that they were confusing, but the orthodox statement of "two natures" was also producing confusion among 19th century Calvinists. This seems to illustrate the point that Bushnell made regarding the inadequacy of a single statement to fully express the meaning of subjective knowledge.

[20]George Hammar, Christian Realism in Contemporary Theology (Uppsala, Sweden: A. B. Lundequistaka Bokhanden, 1940), pp. 128-129. See also Charles Hodge, "Review of Dr. Bushnell's Discourses in God in Christ," Biblical Repertory and Princeton Review, XXI (April, 1849), 291.

really intended to convey a different meaning. Bushnell himself answered this charge by his critics:

> I am not ignorant how much importance has been attached to the belief in Christ's real humanity. It even might have been regarded as a fundamental article of the Christian faith. For if Christ be taken as a mere show or theophany, having no real historic place in humanity, then the gospel has no longer any solid import. It becomes a phantasm and nothing more.[21]

The fact was that Bushnell did not regard the question to Christ's humanity as really important for Christology. "Christ is here to express God, not to puzzle us in questions about the internal composition of his person."[22] As long as the discussion in Christology remained mired in an attempt to find one proper statement to express the mystery of Christ, it was doomed to irrelevancy and failure. Bushnell observed that: "The human element is nothing to me, save as it brings me God, or discovers to me, a sinner, the patience and brotherhood of God, as a redeemer from sin."[23] The importance of the incarnation he considered to be the fact that it was the means which brought God into communication with man so that redemption of human existence might occur. Bushnell did not underestimate the importance of Christ's humanity, but he regarded that humanity to be of secondary importance in Christology. Bushnell pointed out that he considered the problem of Christ's humanity to be

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[21]Bushnell, Christ in Theology, p. 110.

[22]Ibid., p. 94.

[23]Ibid.

secondary because the disordering effect of sin upon all of human existence demanded the supernatural power of God to set it right. Therefore, it was necessary that the answer provided to the problem of sin in human life focus primarily upon the action of God rather than man, upon the divine rather than the human. "What we feel so deeply is that God is with us, on our human level, and is drawn so close to our sympathy--not that a man is."[24] That statement clearly revealed the practical or experiential concern of Bushnell's thought. Man's need of redemption by God through Christ's divinity was the heart of his Christology. And yet he did not allow that point of view to stand as an arbitrary assumption. Bushnell believed that because the scriptural presentation was of the Christ of faith rather than a "Jesus of history," it provided testimony to the fact that the Christians of the New Testament also held that point of view. Further, by attempting to show that sin was an experiential fact of human life he, in effect, laid the groundwork or context for a Christology which emphasized the human need for redemption.

Once one grasps the emphasis and approach of Bushnell's thought regarding Christology, it is possible to understand a statement such as the following in proper context.

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[24] Ibid.

> We [have shown] by a full and critical examination of the character of Jesus, that he is plainly not a human character, and cannot be rightly classed in the genus humanity.[25]

Bushnell was by no means denying the humanity of Jesus. Rather, he was referring to two themes of his argument. First, the scriptures did not present Jesus as an ordinary man. They portrayed a character which transcended humanity as ordinarily understood. Second, Jesus was portrayed in the gospels as one who was not under the bondage of human sin in his person. Thus, he was distinguished from what is called the "genus humanity." In order to speak of humanity there had to be a reference point. For Bushnell, true humanity was what was experienced in Christ, not what was experienced concerning men in general. To discuss the divine and human natures in the person of Christ was, for Bushnell, an irrelevant pastime for theology. He remarked:

> The union of divine in human, being only for expression, what is there in it for us beyond this expression? There may be a human soul here or there may not--this is a matter with which we have nothing to do, and about which we have not only no right to affirm but no right to inquire.[26]

Theology was mistaken when it tried to wring from the gospels answers which were not meant to be expressed by the forms. The forms were never intended to express an answer to the human person of Christ. Bushnell took his stand, "I

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[25]Bushnell, Nature and the Supernatural, p. 351.

[26]Bushnell, Christ in Theology, p. 96.

am refusing to know anything at all concerning it, other than that God is mysteriously incarnate in it . . ."[27]

Bushnell believed that the theologian should be a catalytic agent rather than a reductionist and systematizer. The theologian had to stimulate and bring to life meanings of the gospel forms concerning the incarnation, if an impression was to be produced in living human beings through the mysterious process of the moral or supernatural power rather than the mechanical force of authoritative, dogmatic articles.

> We shall have Him [Christ] thus dynamically, or in virtual impression, when we cannot make out a proper intellectual conception of Him. Here, then, when we come to the question, what is vehicle and what is truth, we neither affirm or deny; but we say, here is the place for mystery, and she meets us only where the place for meeting is.[28]

According to Bushnell, Christology and Christian faith were correlative, that is, Christology was the expression of the Gospel forms while Christian faith was the responsive impression made by that expression in men. Christology was the form of the act of God in history which impresses men's hearts by a moral power and could not be reduced to a formula which had to be believed. The truth of experience and its historical expression could not be separated without destruction of the specific meaning which the forms sought to convey. Separated, their meanings ceased to exist within

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[27] Ibid., p. 109. [28] Ibid., p. 127.

the range of human experience and communication. Thus Bushnell's theory of language led him to conclude that the gospel expressions of the incarnation were the basis for his own expression of Christology, because he recognized them to be expressions of the earliest experience of Christ's meaning to human needs. "In Bushnell's view, the work of Christ was the fullest historic expression of the total nature of God. It was not a mere human example, it was a disclosure of God."[29]

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[29]George B. Stevens, "Horace Bushnell and Albrecht Ritschl, "A Comparison," The American Journal of Theology, VI (January, 1902), 53.

CHAPTER IX

TRINITY

Horace Bushnell's investigation of language in relation to its use in theological doctrine made him dissatisfied with the contemporary understanding of the Trinitarian formula in nineteenth century New England. Following the publication of his view of the Trinity in his book, God in Christ, in 1849, he was severely criticized by his contemporaries and called before the General Association of Connecticut to answer charges of heresy. His rejoinder to the Association was the occasion for the publication of Christ in Theology in 1851. In his answer, he tried to show the different meanings which the Trinity had had for the church. Those meanings he observed were dependent upon how the particular historical community understood the forms of language used in the Trinitarian statement. He contended that the orthodox theologians of New England had misunderstood the intention of the framers of the Nicene Creed and had further confused the question by making literal interpretations of the forms.[1]

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[1]Bushnell, Christ in Theology, p. 170.

Bushnell thought that despite protests to the contrary the doctrine of the Trinity as commonly understood had led the church into practical tri-theism. "We have no standard better than a risiduary tri-theistic compost, such as may be left us after we have cast away that alone which made the only historic doctrine of Trinity possible."[2] Bushnell was convinced that orthodoxy had misinterpreted both the intention and expression of the scriptures and the Nicene Fathers. Consequently, they had come up with a literalized doctrine that derived its authority from the power of church law rather than experience. In fact, he believed that Christian experience would not support the orthodox interpretation. In speaking before the Association, Bushnell remarked, "That you will be wholly satisfied with my representations, trying them by the tests of our New England orthodoxy, I do not expect, or wish. My design was to make issue with this, and even to rein it as a virtual heresy."[3] Bushnell recognized the Unitarian revolt as one result of the rigid literalizing of the creedal statement concerning the Trinity. He gave the Unitarians credit for having understood that the finite language forms of human expression could not be applied literally to the being of God.[4] In that respect Bushnell agreed with the Unitarians and

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[2] Ibid., p. 175.

[3] Ibid., p. 159.

[4] Ibid., pp. 139-140.

found himself allied with them in that he was unable to accept an immanent Trinity.[5] However, he rejected the Unitarian attitude toward the Trinity, because he felt that the Unitarians had not taken seriously the intention of truth behind the form of expression. Thus, Bushnell ruled out both Unitarian and orthodox interpretations of the Trinity on the ground that they contained errors which arose from a misunderstanding of language. He was firmly committed to a concept of Trinity which represented the Christian experience of God. "This cornerstone is not to be so easily removed. It was planted before the foundation of the world, and will remain. It is eternally woven into the practical economy of God's Kingdom, and must therefore stand firm."[6] Because men had struggled to express an idea of Trinity in the language of every historical period of the church, Bushnell concluded that there was such an idea rooted in the Christian experience of God. His conclusion was, of course, based upon his conception of an analogical relationship between human experience and language. That had been his presupposition in approaching his own formulation of the doctrine and he criticizes his Unitarian friend, C. A. Bartol, for rejecting the doctrine as temporary human form.

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[5]H. Shelton Smith, et al., eds., American Christianity (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1963), II, 128.

[6]Bushnell, Building Eras in Religion, pp. 143-144.

> You seem to assume that Trinity, such as you qualifiedly acknowledge, is a human invention to be finally over-reached and antiquated. This I very much doubt. Much more likely is it to me that our human limitation, as finite, requires it, and always will,--that the infinite Unity becomes relational, and eternally will, through it.[7]

Bushnell embraced the formula of the Nicene Creed and gave it a position of central importance. At the same time, he made it clear that to allow one statement or proposition to stand as the whole truth invited decadence and decay through literalization of the metaphoric expression. He particularly liked the Nicene definition because it ended in paradox. He thought that fact should be sufficient to force one beyond the literal, rational meaning to seek the meaning in the supernatural.[8] Bushnell believed that the Nicene Creed was an historical document which was not meant to be taken literally as if God had all the attributes of the human projection which the finite words signified in their objective meaning. To impute substance and person as a literal definition of God's existence was to run the danger of making God a creature and make the doctrine pantheistic. This literalization came about because men had become too concerned about the logical contradiction of the language rather than what the contradiction taught about the subject. Bushnell employed his principle of comprehensive-

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[7]Cheney, Life and Letters, p. 418.

[8]Bushnell, Building Eras in Religion, pp. 280-281.

ness to discover a solution. The creed has

> its meaning or verity more as a combination of symbols offered to the imagination. Accordingly, since it has ceased with many of our times, to be taken and interpreted in that manner, they have also ceased to see it as anything better than a chronicle of absurdity. In which it suffers the common fate of all formulas originally true; viz., that when they are taken as logical definitions, and not any longer as forms to be interpreted by insight, the lower sense, in which they subside, is at once too insipid for respect and too contradictory to be true.[9]

Bushnell accepted creedal statements concerning the Trinity as necessary and valuable to Christian faith provided they were understood as an expression of that faith which resides in human consciousness rather than as a norm for that faith. The trinitarian controversies of every age were confusing and had generated much heat. But if the meaning of the Trinity could be debated and discussed with a proper regard for language, it would provide a fertile ground for new and creative understandings of the meaning of God's relation to men.[10]

Bushnell did not construct a systematic doctrine of the Trinity which he considered to be more true than others. Instead, his object was to define the limits of discussion about the nature of God in terms of the relation of language to the subjective experience. Once those limits were discovered, Bushnell felt that the Trinitarian discussions

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[9]Bushnell, Christ in Theology, p. 178.

[10]Ibid., p. 122.

might be channelled into fruitful directions suggesting to men the "glorious majesty of God." Bushnell insisted that the doctrine of Trinity was an expression of God's revelation to man and as such was an accommodation to the finite forms of human experience. It followed that those finite forms were suitable for human use and practical for life. However, they could not be projected back upon God in a logical or philosophical argument. In man's experience God was, perhaps, three persons in one substance. But, that representation constituted an instrumental Trinity beyond which it was fruitless to speculate.

> It seems to be supposed by many that what I advance concerning the Trinity . . . was designed to be a solution of this great mystery. Precisely contrary of this, my attempt was to find a way of intelligent repose in it without a solution, and even subject to the conviction that no proper solution is possible. I did indeed seek to account for the external fact of Trinity, showing that God, the One, is reviewed to us--the infinite in the finite, spirit in form, or subject, as the nature of language requires, to conditions of form--the process involves a necessity of antagonistic symbols and, if there be an incarnation, pluralities of person, such as meet us in the Trinity of the New Testament. But having thus accounted for the external fact of a Trinity, taken as instrumental in respect to the revelation of God, I insisted that we now have come to the last limit of possible investigation; then we cannot pass over into the divine nature itself and show how the instrumental three of revelation are related to its interior distribution, or precisely what they affirm.[11]

Bushnell exercised his epistemological restraint upon speculation by recognizing that all human language was finite and human experience could not furnish an experience

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[11] Ibid., p. 117.

of God's interior nature. Even to use the phrase "God's interior nature," presupposed that such a thing existed. The only knowledge of God which Bushnell could admit was that which was accommodated to the finite experience and expressed in human language. The orthodox argument for an immanent Trinity was that God's revelation must be what he was in himself or he would not be revealing himself. In reply, Bushnell pointed out that it might be said that God's revelation was of himself but was accommodated to the finite nature of human experience which returned the argument to the same point. One had either to allow that finite humanity could comprehend the infinity of God which makes nonsense of the definitions, or accept that the revelation of the infinite was accommodated to finitude which hardly resolved the dilemma. Since Bushnell felt that such arguments were speculative and irrelevant to the practical task of theology, he chose to take an agnostic stand on the question.

The practical significance of the Trinitarian language for the experience of man was what concerned Bushnell. He attempted to relate the meanings of the words in the creed to a subjective apprehension of God. For example, when the word "persons" is spoken of in the Trinitarian formula:

> They are to be set before the mind at the outset as a holy paradox, that only gives the truth in so great power of expression that it defies all attempts at logic

> or definition. Seizing thus upon the living symbols, we are to chant our response with the church and say: "God is God, light of light, very God of very God!" and, if we cannot reason out the paradox, to like it the better that it stops the clatter of our speculative millwork and speaks to us as God's great mystery should, leaving us to adore in silence. Not that we are here to disown our reason. God is no absurdity as three persons more than as one. Fully satisfied of this, we are only to love the grand abyss of God's majesty thus set before us and rejoice to fall into it, there to bathe and submerge our finite love, rejoicing the more that God is greater than we knew, taller than our search can measure, wider than our finite thought can comprehend.[12]

Since God was not literally a person, the application of that form drawn from man's understanding of himself could not be applied to God. It could be applied literally only to a creature. The suggestive or figurative meaning of that form, as it was represented to human consciousness, was that God was "a real agent who holds Himself related personally to us, meeting us in terms of mutuality, such that we can have the sense of society with Him, and the Constance of His society with us, as if he were in truth a literal person like ourselves."[13] He further pointed out the limit of the word "person" in the creed by citing the other side of the statement concerning the radical unity of substance. Since three men did not share in one particular concrete substance, the statement of the Trinity provided a limit to any creature interpretation of God. The form "person" as used in the creed not in an ordinary sense, but in

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[12]Bushnell, Building Eras in Religion, pp. 147-148.

[13]Ibid., p. 110.

"some tropical, or instrumental sense, that needs not any way to be, and cannot be defined. The plurality therefore, whatever it be, does not divide, but only more sufficiently communicates, the ONE."[14] Such were the limits imposed by the forms of the Creed, and which made it impossible to speculate beyond them. Bushnell was led by those limitations to consider the question regarding the relation of the Trinity of revelation to the being of God in this way: "I can only say that God unrevealed must be as different from God revealed as truth from symbol, a nature transcending our plane of intelligence from a three-fold presence in it."[15] Thus, Bushnell sought to show that God as revealed in terms of time and space had to be understood in terms of an analogical relationship rather than a relationship of identity. Just as particular human experience was in analogical relation to the general language in which it was expressed, so too, God had to be regarded in relation to the revelation of Himself. The literalization of these revelatory forms presupposed an identity which would inevitably lead to a false understanding.

In his attack upon the "literalizers," Bushnell used another illustration from the Creed, the eternal generation of the Son, to point out the absurdity of literality and to

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[14] Ibid., p. 111.

[15] Bushnell, Christ in Theology, p. 150.

show how the words had to be understood as suggestive symbols.

> It can be only that some interior necessity, he is thus accommodated in his action to the finite; for what he does by the necessity of his nature as truly pertains to his idea, and is as truly inherent in him, as if he were the form of this divine substance itself and precisely here we come upon the Nicene Trinity; this and all the formulas of Trinity assert the "eternal generation," affirm the unity of the person as a unity of substance . . . and then regarding the eternal going on, so to speak, of God, his living process or act, actus purissimus, we find Him eternally threeing Himself, or generating three persons. These documents do not mean that God, at some date in His almanac called eternity, began His Son and set forth His Holy Spirit; but that in some high sense undefinable, He is datelessly and eternally becoming three, or by a certain inward necessity being accommodated in His action to the categories of finite apprehension, adjusted to that as to the receiving of his mystery.[16]

It is evident that Bushnell considered the Trinity to be rooted in human consciousness. As such it was necessarily expressed in language forms which, though finite, were able to generate by their symbolic action a sense of both transcendence and community in the relation of God to man. The words of the Trinitarian formula means of knowledge for faith rather than a logical puzzle for the philosopher. The words of the Trinity were "presentations to simple faith and love . . ." The only understanding of God's nature that was possible for man, lay in the practical, that is, in the subjective experience of "Divinity."

Thus far, the discussion has dealt with Bushnell's

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[16]Bushnell, Building Eras in Religion, pp. 134-135.

understanding of the creedal formula for the Trinity. But, as already noted, Bushnell did not believe that the Trinity was an arbitrary human formulation. He regarded the Trinity as an accommodation of God to the structures of experience as witnessed in human consciousness. Bushnell saw the Trinity as an expression of God's revelation within the divine economy of nature and the supernatural.[17]

> First we have the term Father, which sets him before us as the king of nature, the author and ground of all existent things and causes. Next, we have the Son and The Spirit, which represents the supernatural; the son coming into nature from above nature, incarnate in the person of Jesus, by a method not in the compass of nature, erecting a kingdom in the world that is not the world; the Spirit coming in the power of the Son, to complete, by an inward supernatural working, what the Son began by the address he made without to human thought and the forces he imparted it to nature by his doctrine, his works, his life and his death.[18]

Bushnell grounded his concept of Trinity in the human consciousness of nature and the supernatural. He sought to illustrate how the symbolic language forms of the creed suggested or evoked an awareness of the experience of God as not only Creator of the natural, but redeemer and transformer of human personal life in the supernatural realm. Once again, he employed the two-story analogy of language as the model for the Trinity as it was for nature and the supernatural and Christology.

Traditionally, Bushnell's statements concerning the Trinity have been misunderstood by both sympathetic and

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[17] Ibid., p. 126. [18] Ibid., p. 130.

antagonistic interpreters. Bushnell's contemporary, Charles Hodge of Princeton, understood Bushnell to be denying "three persons in the same divine substance."[19] Williston Walker, speaking at the Bushnell Centennial in 1902, probably voiced contemporary opinion by remarking that Bushnell's Trinity of revelation "was indeed a modified Sabellianism."[20] Bushnell, however, did not regard himself as a modalist. The confusion appeared to arise over his unwillingness "to make any judgments concerning the interior nature of God."[21] In answer to the charge of modalism levelled at God in Christ, Bushnell attempted to clarify his views by discussing them in relation to Schleiermacher's "Critique of Sabellius" which he had read in the translation by Moses Stuart.[22]

> Schleiermacher and his translator both assume the possibility of entering into the interior nature of God, and forming an authorized judgment concerning the Trinity as predictable of it. This I deny, and am thus left behind by them both . . . I am found protesting against all judgments and inferences that undertake a leap the gulf between us and the inscrutable mystery of God, insisting that we stay by the Scripture and trust ourselves to no constructive reasonings on the subject,--that the Trinity of revelation is given for us for use and not for

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[19]Charles F. Hodge, "Review of Dr. Bushnell's Discourses in God in Christ," Biblical Repertory and Princeton Review, XXI (April, 1849), 272.

[20]Williston Walker, "Bushnell as a Religious Leader," The Minutes of the 193rd Annual Meeting of the General Association of Connecticut (Hartford: Hartford Press, Case, Lockwood and Brainerd, 1902), p. 27.

[21]Fred Kirschenmann, "Horace Bushnell: Orthodox or Sabellian," Church History, XXXIII (March, 1964), 50.

[22]Bushnell, God in Christ, pp. 111-112.

> theory; that we cannot know exactly where form ends, or how much to refer to form, in a matter so transcendant; that we cannot know exactly where form ends, or attempt to solve or conceive God's interior mystery, by reasonings cast in the molds and categories of our human consciousness, is presumptious, possibly even absurd. . . .[23]

Bushnell refused to answer the question whether there was a triad of persons in the Godhead. The analogical relation of human knowledge expressed in language convinced him that there could be no absolute answer to the question. Accordingly, he defined his position as neither orthodox nor Sabellian. "You perceive in this manner, that my supposed heresy is distinguished, in the same way, both from modalism and the immanent Trinity. One enters into the field of God's interior nature and denies, the other enters and affirms."[24]

Bushnell thought the value of his interpretation of the Trinity was that it provided a way of approach to dramatize the form of the doctrine "that God is a being practically related to His creatures." He evaluated his approach as a solution to the Trinitarian difficulties "just so far as a solution is wanted."[25]

> It is a great advantage of this view, that it gives the law of use and shows exactly where to deposit the mystery of the divine three, as offered to us in the Scriptures. Here then, is a law of use, in which we are to be always comforted,--that in the three, freely accepted, we receive the one, and nothing contrary to the

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[23]Bushnell, Christ in Theology, p. 119.

[24]Ibid., p. 120.

[25]Ibid., p. 121.

> one . . . Whatever we receive, in the Trinity set forth, that is not a knowledge or an impression of the one, is a residuum of form and number that belongs to the medium and vehicle of truth, and not to the truth itself.[26]

Bushnell saw further advantage in his approach to the Trinity. Beside showing how the forms of "persons" and "substance" could be understood, he felt that truth in expression under finite forms could have multiple meanings, which would provoke theologians "to the highest activity of thought concerning God."[27] The doctrine was above all dynamic since one's understanding of meaning in the forms would grow as he followed the method of comprehensiveness.

This chapter has discussed how Bushnell's concept of language in relation to subjective thought and experience influenced his understanding of the words of the Trinitarian formula. It also has endeavored to clarify how those same concepts imposed limitations upon his doctrinal construction. In the following chapter, the discussion will be concerned with how those principles of language shaped Bushnell's view of Atonement. The three great themes, Incarnation, Trinity, and Atonement could not be understood separately according to Bushnell. Just as Bushnell's statements concerning Christology focused upon the human experience of God acting in atonement.

> Trinity is brought down to this, Atonement. They meet us poetically, aesthetically, to pour their contents into us through feeling and imagination; to deposit

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[26] Ibid., p. 125. [27] Ibid., p. 121.

> their contents not in our reason but in our faith,--by faith to be experimented or known experimentally. The Trinity is the algebraic formula of experience. The terms are fact as a feeling and experience,--a.b.c. = x. If anyone chooses to call my doctrine, dogma, and will call every right instrument of suggestion, or expression, even the last cry of Jesus, dogma, I have no objection.[28]

It may be concluded that Bushnell's thought on the Trinity was a direct result of his linguistic epistemology in two respects. He refused to accept or reject an immanent Trinity because he felt that according to his epistemology, he could have no knowledge of the interior nature of God. Moreover, he believed that such knowledge was unnecessary because the revelation of God's threefold nature as an accommodated form to human subjective understanding was all that the human being could grasp in his finitude.

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[28]Cheney, Life and Letters, p. 218.

CHAPTER X

ATONEMENT

It is not possible, in the scope of this study, to deal with every aspect of Bushnell's concept of atonement. The objective here is simply to show how Bushnell's concepts of language in relation to human experience shaped his main views of the atonement. The contemporary interpretations of scriptural language concerning Christ's work were unsatisfactory to Bushnell and here as elsewhere he applied his laws of linguistic use and expression to develop an interpretation of the symbolism of the atonement in scripture.

Bushnell felt that the great difficulty with all classical theories of the atonement was that they attempted to reduce the redemptive work of God in Christ to a systematic statement, and in so doing, they annihilated the very power of the expressive forms of scripture to change men's hearts and minds.

> All attempts to think out the cross and have it in dogmatic statement can result only in disagreement and distraction. If we undertake to make a science out of the altar metaphors, it will be no gospel that we make, but poor, dry jargon--a righteousness that makes nobody

> righteous, a justice satisfied by injustice, a mercy on the basis of pain, a penal deliverance that keeps unfit all the penal liabilities.[1]

Bushnell believed that the problem with the understanding of the atonement was that most ancient and medieval theologians failed to appreciate properly the scriptural forms as symbols and that modern theologians had further complicated the situation by interpreting the abstract language of the original theories without regard to the meaning of the words in the earlier era. If the theories of the atonement were to be understood correctly by men of another historical era, Bushnell thought that they necessarily had to be couched in the language appropriate to that period. Accordingly, he thought the attempt to transfer these forms of expression from one period to another without an understanding of the historically contingent intent behind them was mistaken. Bushnell illustrated that point when he noted that:

> . . . among the first efforts of the church to frame a doctrine of atonement, the death of Christ is often represented, and especially by Irenaus and Origen, as a ransom paid to the devil. No representation probably could be more abhorrent, when taken on its face, to the feelings of all modern Christians. But if we can have patience to withhold our judgment long enough to take down the drapery of the language, or dissolve its figures, thus to separate the real truth of feeling they may have received, under a form of dogma so abhorrent to our speculative views of the subject; in a word, if we can accurately conceive their historic state of mind, when advancing this rude theory of atonement, the first which unlimited reason had produced, we shall find no difficulty in allowing that they had a warm and living

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[1]Cheney, Life and Letters, p. 502.

truth under a form so badly misshapen.[2]

Every theologian had to work with the contemporary forms of language and expression which he had at hand. Bushnell pointed out that in Western culture, especially during the Middle Ages, the predominant forms were drawn from the logical structures of Platonic and Aristotelian philosophy. Thus, Anselm of Canterbury used the Platonic forms of expression in formulating his doctrine of atonement and therefore, according to Bushnell, was limited and stifled in his expression.

> It was the principle misfortune of Anselm, that he was too much afraid of looking on the gospel of the Incarnation as having its value or seeming efficacy, under laws of expression . . . he has no conception that expression is its own evidence. He must make a "solid foundation" by something schemed and reasoned, else there is nothing to authenticate the gospel facts, and show how it is that men's hearts are all authorized to be affected by them, as the express images and true revelations of God. He had no aesthetic, or aesthetically perceptive culture. Truth did not lie in what he might perceive, but in what he might conclude by some process of deduction. Cribbed in thus, and cramped by the inexorable bars of his over-logical training, he could not think of a gospel operating simply by the expression of God, and being only what is expressed by the shining tokens of love and sacrifice; it must be something more scientific, something to be stiffly reasoned under the categories and by the closely defined methods. The result was that his truly great soul was rather narrowed than widened into his subject, and his subject narrowed in turn, to the closely-stinted measures of his method.[3]

Bushnell maintained that a proper understanding of atonement required consideration of two linguistic factors which he

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[2]Bushnell, Building Eras in Religion, p. 412.

[3]Bushnell, The Vicarious Sacrifice, pp. 22-23.

had described. To ignore them was to distort the expression of the Christian experience of forgiveness and reconciliation. The first factor was the hermeneutical problem of attaining a proper understanding of the expression of the atonement in the language of the New Testament. Bushnell believed that the major failure of subsequent generations of theologians was the assumption that New Testament language was, like their own, modeled after Platonic and Aristotelian deductive forms. Before the modern theological tradition of Western culture, the question as to whether the world view of the New Testament writers, expressed by their language, was radically different from that of the later Roman Empire or the Middle Ages was rarely entertained. The second factor of linguistic misunderstanding was a consequence of the first. Because of the failure to distinguish different uses of language in the New Testament from their own, the Medieval Theologians, particularly, were unconscious of the effect of the Greek philosophical media which they employed. That media actually changed the experience of forgiveness and reconciliation. It was Bushnell's opinion that the Aristotelian categories employed by the medieval theologians, because it expressed relationships in an objective language of cause and effect, had transformed the subjective symbolism of the New Testament into an objective symbolism. The result of that objective language was that it had generated the concept of an objective experience of atonement.

Bushnell was distressed by his observation that the current theories of atonement taught and practiced in New England were direct descendants of the Anselmic theory. The theologians had taken over that "classical" idea of the work of Christ without proper understanding of the difference in the meaning of language between the Medieval and the modern periods.[4] Bushnell felt that the confusion was compounded by the fact that Anselm's intention had been misunderstood and accordingly the forms of expression had become hardened and literalized into a doctrine of the satisfaction of God's honor and righteousness which was contrary to scripture.

> No writer was ever more unfortunate than Anselm is, in the feeble, undiscerning constructions put upon his argument, by the immense, following that has accepted his mastership. They take what he says of death, as if it were matter of book account that Christ has come to settle; or what he says of justice, as if he were engaged to even up the score of penalties; or, what he says of pain, as if he had to come to bring in some comprensative quantity of suffering valuable for the total amount, and not in any sense valuable for the quality or expression, by which it may restore the honors of God infringed by disobedience. His obedience, is too, taken as if it were satisfaction, not because of the righteousness declared, but on account of the pains contributed in it.[5]

Because of that literalizing process of using language as an objective sign rather than symbol, Bushnell saw the language of Atonement becoming de-personalized and objectified

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[4]Even Nathaniel Taylor still thought of atonement as primarily an objective act. Nathaniel W. Taylor, "Notes" (MS in Yale Divinity School Library), II, pp. 172-200, as referred to in H. Shelton Smith, Horace Bushnell (New York: Oxford Press, 1965), p. 21.

[5]Ibid., pp. 15-16.

beyond the reach of the human experience of redemption. An objective transaction to be believed, Bushnell insisted, could not contain the supernatural moral power to transform the hearts of men. An objective fact could be believed because of the physical authority of the Church and could therefore control outward behaviour. But it was not the answer to the supernatural question of sin and guilt in the inner experience of human life.[6] Bushnell thought that the language of scripture had to be approached anew with an awareness of the subjective symbols of God's work in Christ if one were to restore the understanding of atonement to faith rather than reason. He did not wish to create a new doctrine of atonement. On the contrary, he sought to make its effect felt in the interior life of every human being by what he felt was the proper understanding of scriptural language.[7]

The first step to restoring the atonement to faith was to take seriously the Apostle Paul's statement that, "God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto Himself." Bushnell believed that this statement was the expression of the New Testament experience concerning the meaning of

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[6]The objectification of faith was contrary to the intention of Anselm who understood his theory to be a rational demonstration of the faith he had experienced. Anselm stood in the Augustinian tradition of the primacy of faith and remarked, "I believe in order that I may understand." Bushnell felt that he was restoring the proper order of faith and reason.

[7]Ibid., pp. 31-32.

Christ's work. Man was reconciled to God through God's initiative. There could be no room for statements which call for the changing of God's mind about man. God was not reconciled to man, but rather man to God. To explain his position, Bushnell pointed to two representations of Christ in the Scripture which were actually the same when properly understood.[8] The first he called the subjective view, that is, statements concerning the interior transformation of men by the work of Christ. Those were confessions of faith which represented the point of view of experience. There were also the objective, sacrificial forms applied to Christ's work such as "Lamb of God," "ransom," "propitiation," "blood," "substitute," etc., which presented Christ's work as an historical act. Bushnell observed that traditionally the greatest error had been the consequence of the separation of those two forms of expression in formulating atonement theories.

> . . . As a mere objective remission or formal absolution is nothing, unless it be executed by an subjective deliverance from the power and penal bondage of the sins remitted, so an objective formal justification is really nothing, save as there is executed, in the soul and its character, an inward and natural deliverance from the retributive causes by which it is corrupted and held in penal subjection. The objective, forensic justification is nothing, in fact, but a mode of conceiving the inward subjective deliverance. What is, in real truth, the other; just as condemnation, passed for a state of sin, is a state of being called the state of condemnation or

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[8]Bushnell, God in Christ, p. 189.

spiritual death.[9]

A purely objective view of atonement had to be rejected on the ground that it did not change man's heart. The penal substitution theory, or a theory which purports to save God's honor and justice by legal transfer and appeals to the objective scriptural forms to support its system, arose from a failure to understand the scripture forms as symbols of the subjective meaning of the outward events of Christ's work. Bushnell pointed out that the objective forms were not in the events themselves, but were rather symbols which expressed the subjective meaning which those events had in the lives of those who bore witness to them in the scriptures.[10] Thus, the subjective meaning of the atonement created the objective forms. Accordingly, the subjective had to be granted priority in any doctrine of atonement. It was the reversal of that priority in the objective-subjective view popular in orthodoxy which Bushnell felt had led to a great deal of error. Such a view supposed that by God's objective act of sacrifice there was a real objective justification passed upon man who, when he received it, responds with love and gratitude. It carried with it a doctrine of imputation of grace "which contains some element radically false and the error appears to have been, that the

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[9]Bushnell, Christ in Theology, p. 288.

[10]Ibid., p. 240.

scripture phrases of imputation were taken, not as objective forms, answering to an operative and subjective effect, but as affirmations of some real judicial transfer."[11] Bushnell posed the question of the precedence of faith or reason in the doctrine of the atonement.

> Are we to conceive that God passes an objective sentence of justification upon them that believe, which is followed by an internal and experimental deliverance; or that executing this deliverance, in and through the faith of them that believe, we apprehend the fact that, or conceive it, in a way of objective representation that supports our faith?[12]

The "altar forms," as Bushnell called the objective symbols of atonement, were merely demonstrations of what faith had already perceived and struggled to express. They possessed an analogical relation to the experience of faith as was observed in the case of all language as Bushnell viewed it. What he wished to establish by the rejection of the objective-subjective view of the atonement was the false impression it created that the objective or "altar forms" of the scriptures are historically perceivable in the event itself. The "altar forms" were the means of communicating the significance of the event of God's reconciling act to the subjective understanding of the New Testament community. They were necessary to the Christian faith as the link or means of expression between the subjective impression of the event on the historical community and the later communities

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[11] Ibid., p. 311.

[12] Ibid., p. 283.

who no longer were able to perceive the event except through the symbols of scripture. On that basis Bushnell also rejected a purely subjective view of the atonement such as he conceived that of Coleridge and the Unitarians to be.[13] They rejected the "altar forms" as meaningless since they saw that these forms were not in the event itself. Bushnell believed that by rejecting them, the Transcendentalists had lost the possibility of recovering the historical meaning of the Christ event. Thus, they found themselves limited to piecing together a historical Jesus in the hope that his meaning would become clear.

> Now the question is, wherein lies the truth of this altar view of the Saviour's death and what does it mean? And the answer is, first of all, that it is not, by supposition, a properly historical truth or truth of <u>fact</u>; for, in that sense, there was no sacrifice. Christ was not offered, according to the human view, as a sacrifice.[14]

Starting from his assumptions concerning form and language, Bushnell moved to what he conceived as the only possible approach to understanding the atonement. Whether one began with the Christ event in history, as did the New Testament community, or with the symbols of scripture, what made them true and real was the subjective appropriation to oneself in faith. The subjective impression was the only possible authentication of the objective expression. The subjective perception of meaning in event created forms in

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[13] <u>Ibid</u>., p. 322.

[14] <u>Ibid</u>., p. 241.

which to express that meaning. Objective symbolic forms, if allowed to be understood subjectively as one understands a work of art, generated or stimulated an experience similar to the one which produced the symbols. Literature constantly suffered as did all artistic expression, from the transformation of symbolism into sign language by too great concentration upon the symbol itself. For example, a sensitive, well-written novel exploring and expressing the deepest human relationships, might be labeled "pornographic" by those who literalized the symbols. The result, of course, that love becomes the mechanical act of sex in the minds of those who have lost the ability to perceive the subjective symbol. As Bushnell observed, in the same way, the death of Christ portrayed in the Gospels became, a mechanical transaction of literal sacrifice to satisfy God's apparent honor.

Bushnell believed that the work of Christ took place in a community that was uniquely prepared culturally and psychologically to bring this meaning into form or symbol.

> . . . It is remarkable, however, this may be, that not withstanding the specially unrefective, outgoing habit of the Hebrews, we discover a tendency in them, so early developed, to find some spiritually subjective sense, in all their most objective and even fleshly rites. Thus, it was that circumcision, associated with the idea of cleanliness, slid into a spiritual application.[15]

Given the sacrificial structure of their culture, the Jews who wrote the New Testament were familiar with symbols which

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[15] Ibid., p. 261.

were well adapted to communicate and express the significance which they perceived in the Christ event. Those forms possessed a uniqueness which Bushnell described as "sacred." By that term he meant that they communicated the supernatural to men. By the fact that they emerged out of the consciousness of the meaning of the historical event which they expressed, they could not be replaced by any other form or term which lacked that association.[16] Bushnell tried to make clear that the "altar forms" were not a substitute for the historical event of the work of Christ. They functioned as interpreters of the event. They were a symbolic commentary on the meaning of the divine-human historical drama.[17] Bushnell found that the test of the symbolic language of the New Testament was its ability to express the meaning of the atonement in the actual perception of Christians. He believed that these forms, when properly introduced, had stood the test of use in the church.

> Why to say; "Behold the Lamb of God, that taketh away the sin of the world." signifies, in the heart's sues, more than whole volumes of palaver in any possible words of possible language. No living disciple, having once gotten the sense of these types of the altar, will ever try to get his gospel out of them and preach it in the common terms of language. Quite as certainly will he never try, having once gotten their meaning, to hold them literally,--Christ made literally sin for us, a literal lamb, literal sacrifice, bleeding literally for the uses of his blood. But he will want them as the dear interpreters and equivalents of God's mercy in the cross, putting himself before them to read and read again, and drink and drink again their full divine mean-

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[16] Ibid., p. 266.

[17] Ibid.

> ings into his soul. Beholding more truths in their faces than all the contrived theories and speculative propositions of schools, he will stay fast by them, owning them, wanting never to get clear of them, or away from the dear and still more dear impression of their power.[18]

Bushnell's homiletic and passionate style appears to be the naive and unsophisticated rambling of a frontier preacher. It is not surprising to find that Bushnell's contemporaries did not take him as a serious theologian. Having rejected the statements of the classical theories of atonement, Bushnell was subjected to great abuse and criticism especially from conservative circles. His most formidable and articulate critic, Charles Hodge, failed to appreciate Bushnell's statements about the forms not being in the events themselves.

> It is among the first principles of the oracle of God, that regeneration and sanctification are not aesthetic effects produced through the imagination. They are moral and spiritual changes, wrought by the Holy Ghost, with and by the truth as revealed to the reason. The whole healthful power of the things of God over the feelings, depends upon their being true to the intellect. If we are affected by the revelation of God as a father, it is because he is a father, not a picture of one. If we have peace through faith in the blood of Christ, it is because he is a propitiation of our sins in reality, and not an artistic form merely.[19]

Hodge did not accept the distinctions Bushnell had made between experience and form, thought and language, or sign and symbol. Bushnell could not understand how Hodge and his

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[18]Bushnell, Building Eras in Religion, p. 263.

[19]Hodge, "Bushnell's Discourses," pp. 268-269.

colleagues could make a mechanical, physical act answer the need of supernatural redemption unless it was viewed as a symbol of the supernatural or moral suffering of God. For Bushnell, the physical act of Christ's suffering was a symbol of God's moral suffering.[20] On the other hand, Hodge's inability to accept the subjective meanings of language could be understood as a result of his resistance to the doctrines of historical relativism pioneered by Schleiermacher and Dilthey.[21]

Bushnell continued to develop the theme of the atonement and embodied it in his work, The Vicarious Sacrifice (1865). In the remaining years of his life, he continued to think and write on this subject. In 1874, he published Forgiveness and Law which was his last work.[22] Bushnell died in 1876. Both of his books on the atonement were published together after his death, as two volumes of the same work, entitled The Vicarious Sacrifice.

Noah Porter of Yale College, in 1866, reviewed Bushnell's first book on The Vicarious Sacrifice. While Porter did not accept Bushnell's theory of language, he remarked:

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[20]Bushnell, The Vicarious Sacrifice, p. 73.

[21]Hodge defended an objective view of history in which he viewed historical sources as chronicles of fact and described Schleiermacher's subjectivism as "philosophical mysticism." (See Hodge, p. 274.)

[22]Even though Bushnell expanded and refined his expression, the theory which he set forth in God in Christ (1848) was still the basis of his thinking in Forgiveness and Law.

> While, then, we reject the theory of Dr. Bushnell as fall short of the fullness of Scriptural truth, we recognize, with the utmost satisfaction, that he reaches substantially the Scriptural view of Christ's work in every possible practical application which may be made of it in a soul of man.[23]

That was perhaps the greatest tribute that could be paid to Bushnell's work since he seemed to succeed in exactly what he intended "to exhibit . . . that Christ whom so many centuries of discipleship have so visibly been longing and groping after . . ."[24]

This discussion of Bushnell's theory of atonement has attempted to make clear a number of important points. First, Bushnell's approach to understanding the work of Christ was determined by his understanding of New Testament language as an expression of the subjective impression made upon those who viewed Christ's death. On that basis, he rejected all theories which explained atonement as a legal, objective sacrifice apart from the subjective impression which produced a change of heart in the individual. As a result, Bushnell proposed a theory which reversed the emphasis of scholastic theories of atonement in two ways. He directed the atonement toward man as the suffering love of God for the redemption of man rather than as a perfect man's sacrifice to satisfy a requirement of God. He also

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[23]Noah Porter, "Review of Dr. Bushnell on The Vicarious Sacrifice," The New Englander, XCV (April, 1866), 282.

[24]Bushnell, The Vicarious Sacrifice, p. 32.

attempted to return to the Augustinan tradition by directing the effect of atonement to the personal subjective experience of the individual where faith consists of passionate commitment rather than intellectual assent to a doctrine about atonement.

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